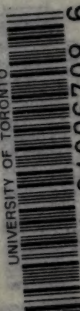


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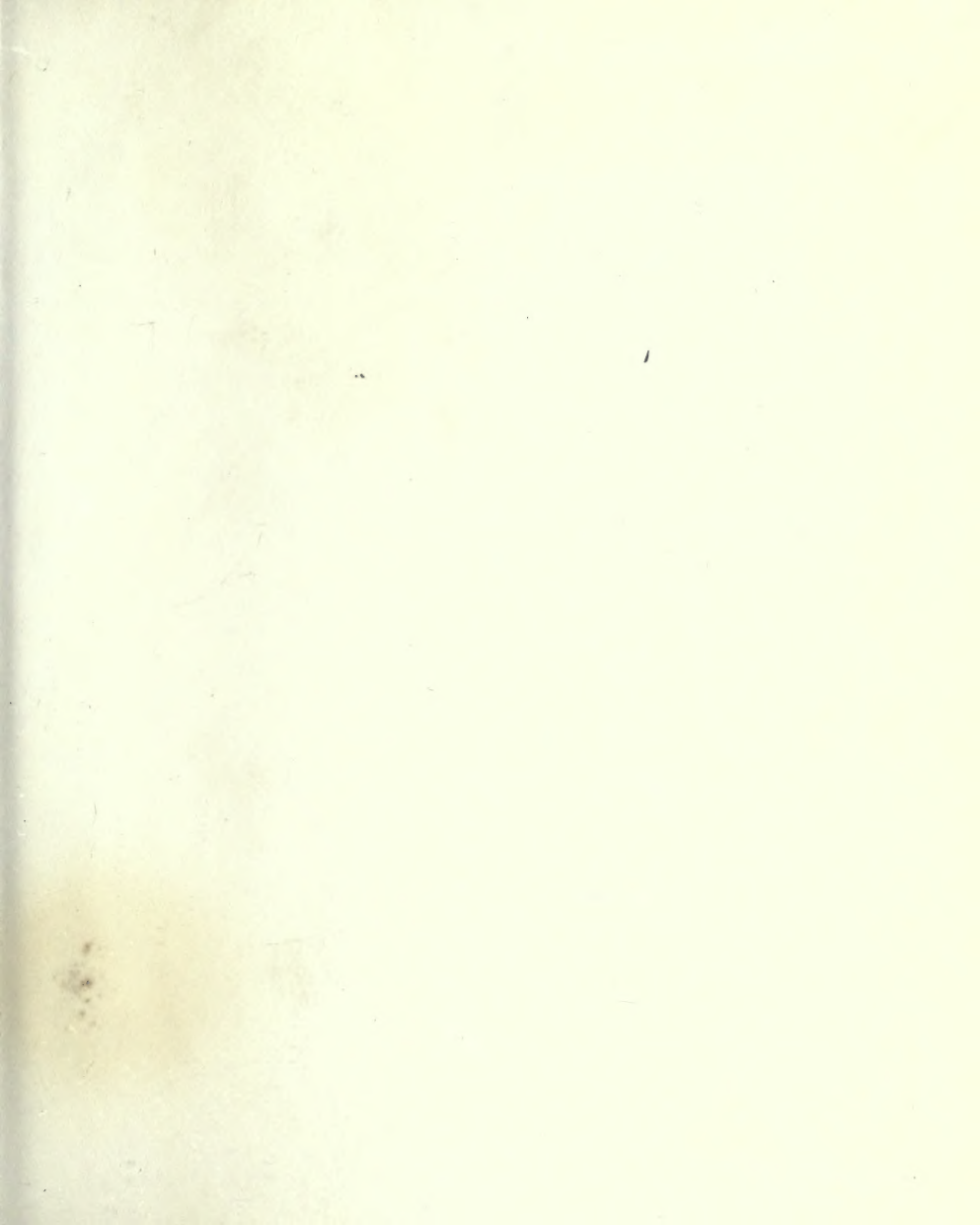
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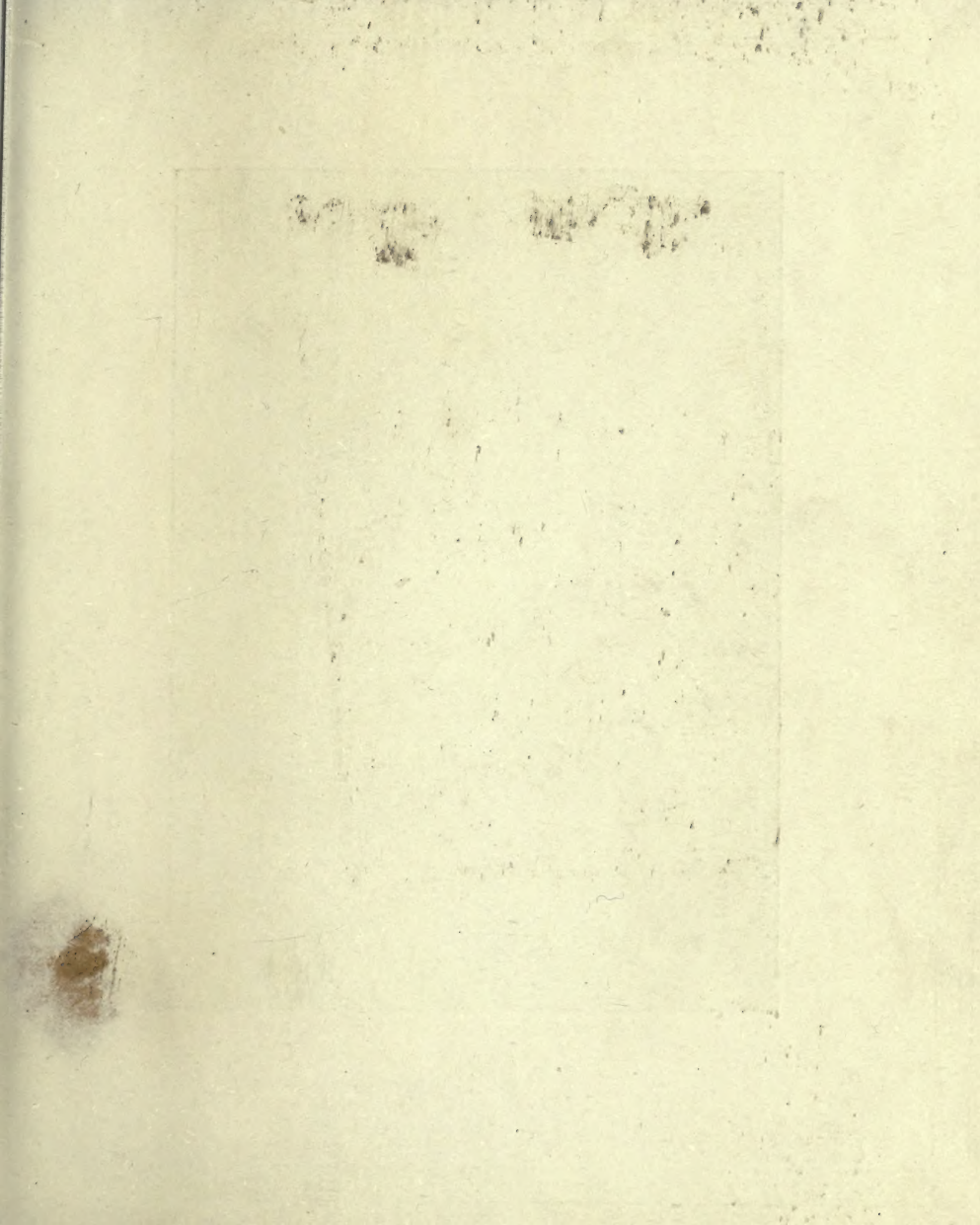
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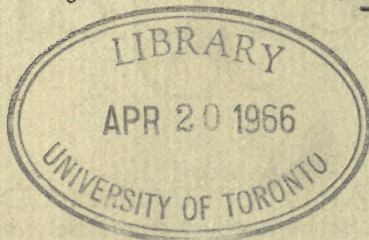
Rubāiyāt of Omar Khayyām

Translated by
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Edited, with Introduction and Notes, by
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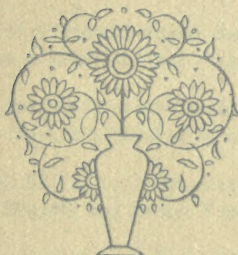
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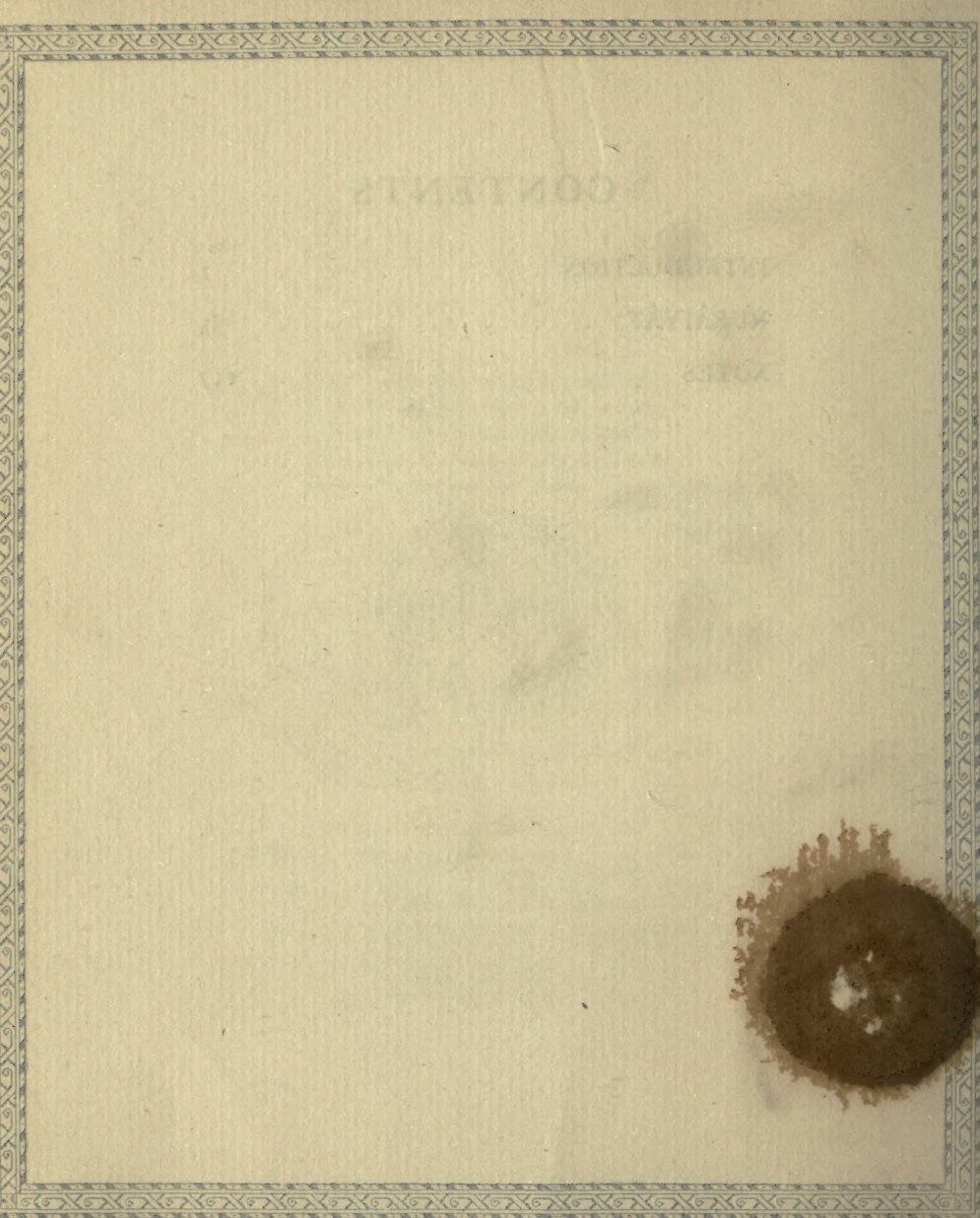
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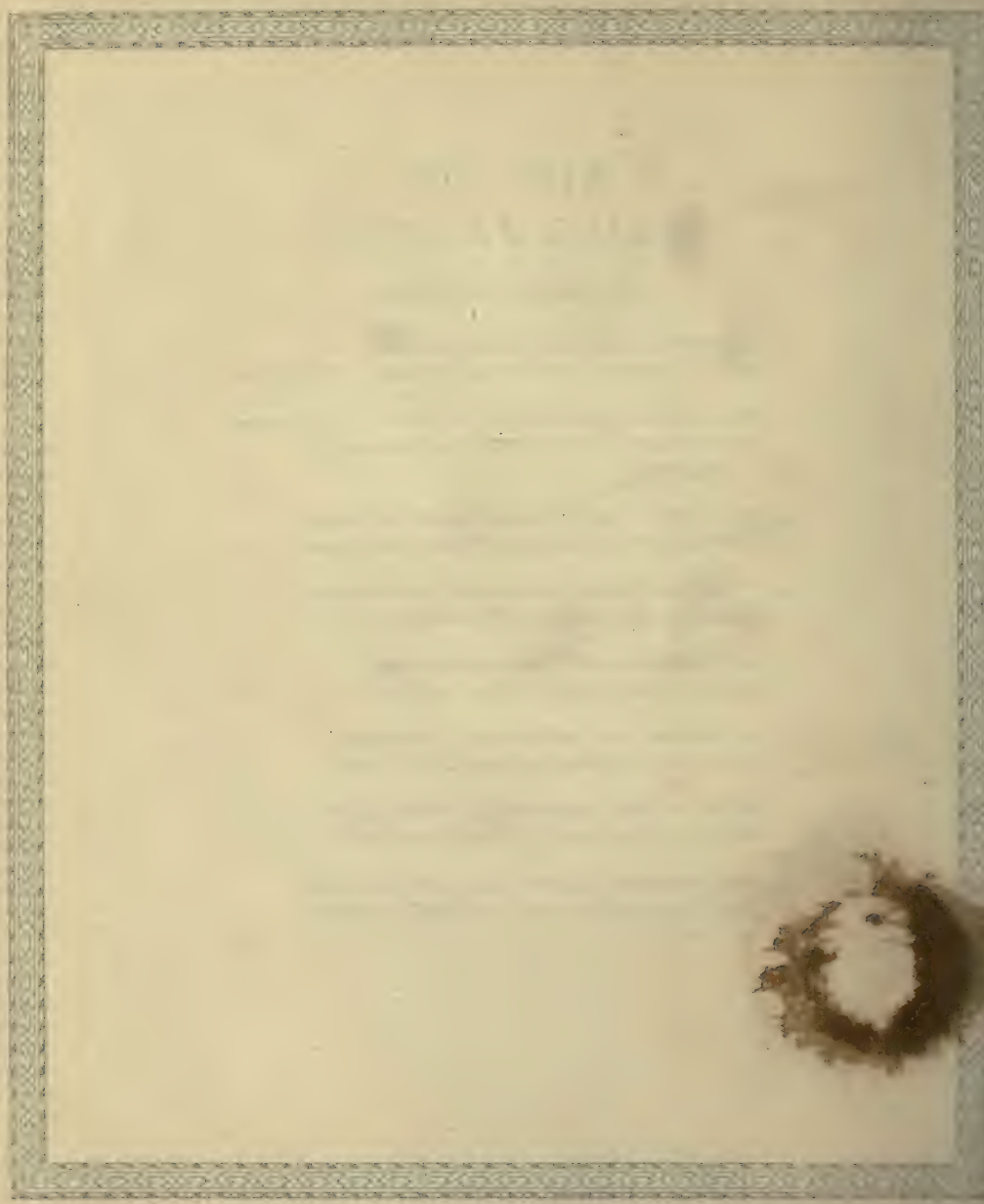




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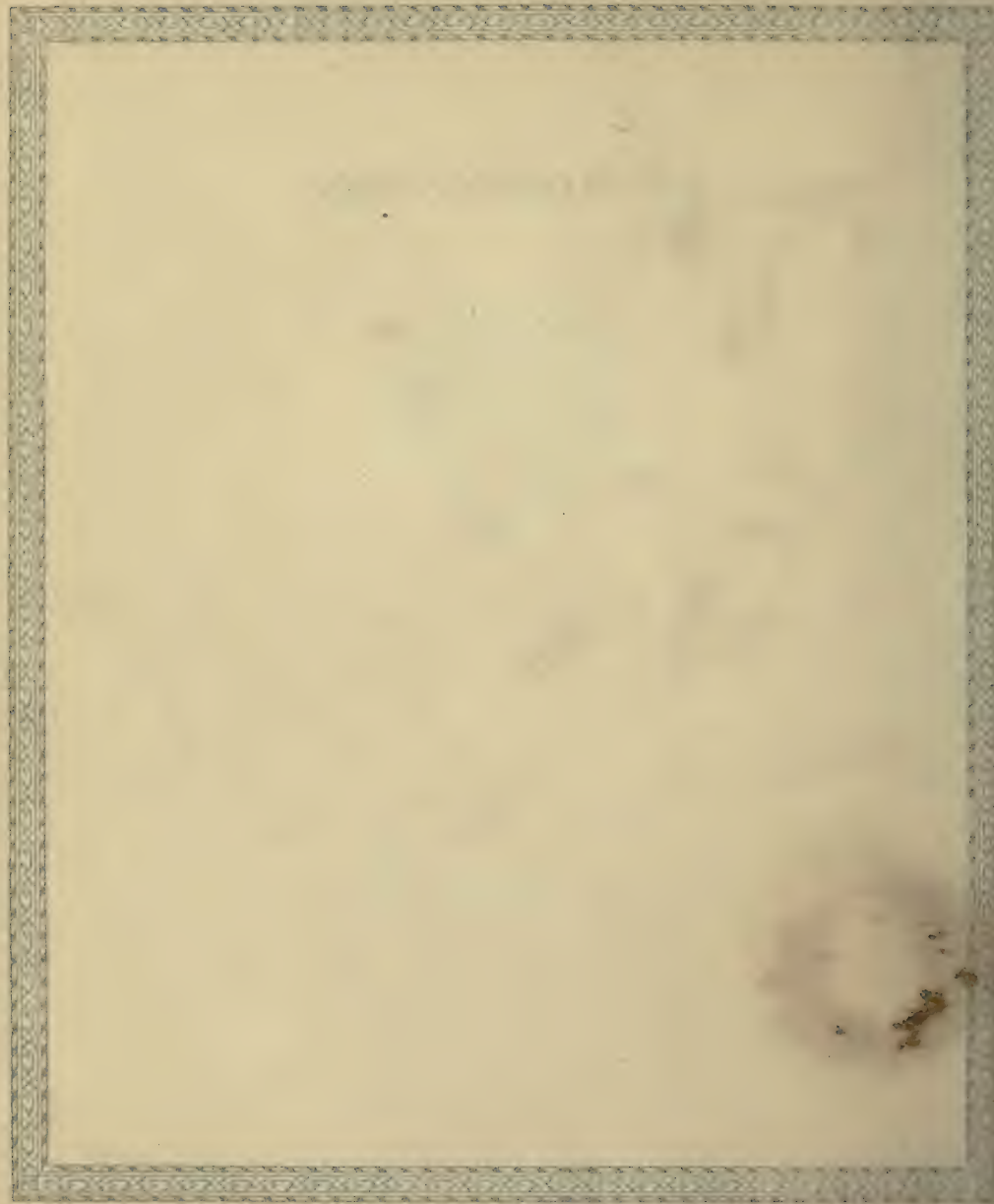
By GILBERT JAMES

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INTRODUCTION





INTRODUCTION

IT is important that European readers who seek information concerning the life and character of Omar Khayyâm should realise how little is known definitely, notwithstanding the enormous number of books, commentaries, and articles which have been written on this subject during the last fifty years. A great deal of 'Omarian' literature is deplorably uncritical, and it is only recently that scientific researches, based on the original authorities, have been undertaken. Though mainly negative, the results of modern Oriental scholarship, starting from Schukovski's famous article on *Omar Khayyâm and the Wandering Quatrains* (1897), have at least cleared the ground and defined the limits within which a solid construction may be raised. These limits are exceedingly narrow in the present state of our knowledge, and leave no room for such fanciful portraits of the poet as have hitherto been customary. We know next to nothing of his life or the society in which he moved, and the few authentic records do not take us far towards an intimate conception of his character. "But," the reader may object, "we have his poetry: surely the truth, or some clue to it, will be found there." To this the answer is, that while in one sense we have Omar's poetry, in another sense we have not. Many quatrains included in the so-called *Rubá'iyât*

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of *Omar Khayyâm* are unquestionably his. A very large proportion, however—probably not less than nine-tenths—of the whole collection is the work of other hands. Both in style and matter the spurious quatrains are indistinguishable from the genuine. It is impossible, except in one or two isolated instances, to decide from the evidence before us whether Omar wrote any particular *rubâ'i* among the thousands which pass under his name.

For the reasons here briefly stated, Omar's personality must be regarded as an insoluble problem, although its general features, I think, may be guessed at. The trustworthy reports of his life are too scanty to provide even the outlines of an accurate historical sketch, while hardly a ray of light can reach us through the mass of foreign material in which his poetry lies inextricably embedded.

It follows that our attention will be transferred from Omar to the *Rubâ'iyât* themselves, which are not the product of a single age or of an individual mind, but the many-sided expression of a people's spiritual and intellectual life, the work of many poets, known and unknown, covering a period of six centuries. In this respect the Persian collection resembles the Greek Anthology, but instead of being classified according to subject the contents

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of the former are arranged in the alphabetical sequence of their rhymes.

What I have to say in this Introduction falls under three heads: firstly, the life and character of Omar; secondly, the *Rubâ'iyât* as they have come down to us; and lastly, FitzGerald's poem, in which he has woven the scattered threads of the Persian original into one complete and imperishable masterpiece.

I

THE LIFE AND CHARACTER OF OMAR KHAYYÂM

OMAR KHAYYÂM (or Khayyâmî) was born, probably at Nîshâpûr, in the north-east of Persia, between 1025 and 1050 A.D. His surname, Khayyâm (Tent-maker), does not prove that he or his father was actually engaged in that trade, but corresponds to many English names of industrial derivation, *e.g.* Tanner, Mercer, Goldsmith. The familiar story of his friendship at Nîshâpûr with two schoolfellows who afterwards became celebrated—the great vizier, Nizâmu 'l-Mulk, and Hasan Sabbâh, Grand Master of the terrible Assassins—although it has been traced back to a comparatively early date (about 1300 A.D.), is open to criticism on chrono-

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logical and other grounds, and bears all the marks of being one of those romantic fictions with which Oriental writers are fond of embellishing the lives of illustrious men. That Omar received an excellent education may be taken for granted. We first hear of him in 1074 A.D. as an eminent astronomer presiding over a commission appointed by Sultan Malikshâh to reform the calendar. During the period of political and religious strife which ensued upon the death of Malikshâh, in 1092 A.D., he seems to have left his native town ; but we do not know how long his absence lasted, and whether it was voluntary or inspired by fears for his safety. In 1112 A.D. he was at Balkh and uttered the famous prediction, " My grave will be in a spot where the trees will shed their blossoms on me twice a year." Two years later, while staying in the house of the Prime Minister, Sadru'ddîn Muhammad, at Merv, he showed his skill in astrology by promising the king fair weather for a hunting expedition. The year of his death is uncertain, but the date usually given, 1123 A.D., has nothing against it, and agrees with the testimony of his friend and admirer, Nizâmî Arûzî of Samarcand, who, on visiting his grave at Nishâpûr, in 1135 A.D., observes that Omar " had veiled his countenance in the dust " some years ago.

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So much for the external course of his life. Let us now see what impression he made on his contemporaries.

The oldest notice of Omar occurs in the *Chahâr Maqâla*, or 'Four Discourses,' by the above-mentioned Nizâmî 'Arûzî, a professional poet, who lived "chiefly in Khorâsân at royal courts, where he had opportunities of meeting many noteworthy persons," and died in the latter half of the twelfth century of our era. This valuable and highly interesting work, of which Professor Browne published an English translation in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1899), is divided into four sections dealing respectively with the Secretarial Art, the Poetic Art, the Science of Astrology, and the Science of Medicine. It is significant that Omar is ranked among the astrologers, and that no allusion is made to his poetry. The two anecdotes told of him describe the prognostications which I have already mentioned, and how in each case his words were fulfilled. Nizâmî expresses the opinion that Omar had not any great belief in astrological predictions, but shared the incredulity of eminent scientists on this point. He calls Omar 'the Argument of Truth' (*Hujjatu 'l-Haqq*), speaks of him with the affectionate reverence due to a master, and says that he had never seen his like in the world.

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This is the only contemporary record of importance that has been preserved, but in the *Firdausu 'l-Tawârikh*, an historical work composed in the first decade of the fifteenth century, we find a citation from Abu 'l-Hasan al-Baihaqî¹ to the effect that he was present at a meeting (of learned men) in Omar's house in the year 1111 A.D., and was asked by him to explain a difficult Arabic verse.

Fuller information concerning Omar is given by several writers of the thirteenth century. As all these passages, which Schukovski published in the original Arabic or Persian with a Russian translation, have been rendered into English by Dr Denison Ross, and are well known to students, I shall only refer to them in so far as they seem to throw light on Omar's character.

Najmu'ddîn Dâya (died 1256 A.D.), author of a mystical treatise entitled *Mirsâdu 'l-'Ibâd*, reckons him among those unfortunate "philosophers and materialists" who have gone astray from the Truth, and quotes two quatrains as evidence of "his utter shamelessness and corruption." Since this is the

¹ This person, who has not hitherto been identified, is probably Abu 'l-Hasan 'Ubaidu 'llah ibn Muhammad ibn al-Imâm Abî Bakr al-Baihaqî, a traditionist "of little merit." His death at the age of 74 is chronicled in the *Shadharâtus 'l-Dhahab*, a manuscript in my collection, under the year 523 A.H. (1129 A.D.).

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earliest reference to Omar's *Rubā'iyāt*, and one of the very few cases in which we can be fairly confident that we have before us a genuine specimen of his poetry, I append a literal translation of the verses in question (Whinfield, Nos. 508 and 126) :

To the circle wherein is our coming and going
Neither beginning nor end is visible.
No one in this world can rightly tell
Whence is our coming and whither is our going.
When the Lord moulded His creatures out of diverse
elements,
Why did He subject them to decay ?
If they are well shaped, why does He shatter them ?
And if these forms are ill-shaped, whose fault is it ?

The same view of Omar is presented by Ibnu l-Qiftî in his 'Chronicle of the Sages' (*Târikhu l-Hukamâ*). Omar, he says, was a teacher of Greek science, and had an unrivalled knowledge of astronomy and philosophy. His want of religion, though he tried to conceal it, exposed him to attacks which made him more cautious than ever in uttering his real opinions. He performed the pilgrimage to Mecca, not from piety but from motives of prudence, and when he reached Baghdâd on his homeward journey refused to meet the learned scientists of that city who were eager to become acquainted with him. Ibnu 'l-Qiftî quotes the following Arabic verses by Omar, with the remark

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that his poetry is widely circulated, and reveals an irreligious spirit to those who look below the surface:

If my soul is content with a livelihood sufficient for my needs, which is gained by the labour of my hands and arms,

I am safe from all changes and accidents, and care not whether Time threatens me or flatters my hopes.

Have not the revolving Heavens determined to reduce all happiness to misfortune?

Therefore, O my soul, abide patiently in thy sleeping-place: its towers will not topple down until its foundations have collapsed.

From the 'Delight of Spirits' (*Nuzhatu 'l-Arwâh*), a volume containing biographies of savants by Shahrazûrî, we learn that Omar belonged to the philosophic school of Avicenna, that he was ill-tempered and parsimonious, that he had an excellent memory but disliked teaching, and that his dying words were: "O God, I have known Thee to the full extent of my power: forgive me, therefore, since my knowledge of Thee is my only means of approaching Thee."

Qazwînî, whose account of Omar in his *Âthâru 'l-Bilâd* closes the list of thirteenth-century authorities, does not add any essential particulars to what has been said above.

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The main results of our inquiry as to the view of Omar's character that prevailed among his contemporaries, and those who lived within a period of 150 years after his death, may be summarised thus : Omar was pre-eminently a man of science. This is emphasized by all the authorities. They describe him as one who drank deep at the well of Greek wisdom, and composed many famous works on astronomy, mathematics, metaphysics, and natural philosophy. If they go on to accuse him of free-thought, the same charge was incurred by every Moslem scientist who failed to bring his speculations into line with the Koran and the Traditions of the Prophet. And the accusers, from their own illiberal standpoint, were usually right. Omar, like other intellectual men, must have travelled in search of truth far beyond the punctilious dogmas of Muhammadan divinity. As regards his attitude to mysticism, I think the testimony of Najmu'ddîn Dâya is decisive. That writer, who was himself an ardent Sûfi, condemns Omar in no measured terms as a philosopher and materialist, that is to say, as a declared enemy of mysticism. We are not bound to ratify his verdict, so far as it brands Omar with materialism—a name often flung at philosophers by devout opponents—but his words are weighty as showing how Omar was judged by Sûfis in the

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thirteenth century. It hardly seems possible that Omar, had he been naturally inclined to the mystic's way of looking at things, would have penned the two quatrains which Najmu'ddîn quotes against him. Profound study of the exact sciences rarely predisposes to childlike faith in the Unseen or to enthusiastic self-abandonment. In my opinion, it is more than dubious whether Omar wrote any of the purely mystical quatrains, of which there are a considerable number in the collection, although he was, of course, familiar with mystical phraseology, and may have found it a useful mask for sentiments which he might fear to express openly. "The later Sûfis," says Ibnu 'l-Qiftî, "are in accord with some of the *outward meanings* of his poetry, but its *esoteric sense* is a biting criticism of the ecclesiastical law."

Omar was a man of science in the first place, a poet occasionally, a freethinker by necessity, in some moods, perhaps, a mystic, but he played with Sûfî-ism rather than believed in it. Thus do I read the salient features of his character, using the only evidence available at present. To discuss his religious and philosophical views in detail would be a work of imagination which, with all deference to those who have written on this topic, I have not the courage to undertake. If it be permissible

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to hazard any conjecture as to his positive beliefs, I should surmise that he accepted Islam in something of the same spirit and, *mutatis mutandis*, with the same reservations which have enabled many distinguished scientists in the Middle Ages and our own times to accept Christianity.

II

THE RUBÂ'İYÂT

THE texts of the *Rubâ'iyât* vary considerably in extent, the fullest (Add. 1055 in the Cambridge University Library) containing 801 quatrains. The most ancient manuscript, however, which is preserved in the Bodleian Library, contains only 158 *rubâ'is*; it is dated 1461 A.D., nearly three and a half centuries after the poet's death. A facsimile of this text has been published by Mr Heron-Allen (London, 1898). The Bibliothèque Nationale possesses a manuscript of 349 quatrains, dated 1528 A.D., while 604 are found in one of the same age belonging to the Public Library at Bankipore. There are also several MSS. of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Until a few years ago every one believed that the quatrains collected under the name of Omar

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Khayyâm were substantially by his hand. This presumption received a rude shock in the year 1897, when Professor Schukovski, in a paper which appeared in Russian and was translated into English by Dr Denison Ross (*Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* for 1898, pp. 349-366), showed that 82 quatrains ascribed to Omar occur in the works of other Persian poets. Of this number about half belong to three great poets—Farîdu'ddîn 'Attâr, Jalâlu'ddîn Rûmî, and Hâfiz; the rest are shared by some forty authors of more or less distinction, e.g. Abû Sa'îd, Avicenna, Firdausî, Anwarî, Sanâ'î, and 'Abdallah Ansârî. Since the publication of Schukovski's article the number of 'wandering quatrains' has risen to 101, a total which would be enormously increased if the entire field of Persian poetry were explored in a systematic manner, and if account were taken of anonymous quatrains, either written as variations on those which already formed part of the collection or added to it for no better reason than that Omar being celebrated as a quatrain-writer, it was natural and convenient to ascribe to him any favourite *rubâ'i* of which the authorship was unknown. Even in the oldest and probably least adulterated MS. the proportion of spurious quatrains already discovered and assigned to their authors is twelve per cent.: how many

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have not been, or can never be, detected? As time passed and the texts grew in size, larger accretions of alloy must have continually gathered round the true Omarian metal, which has come down to us indeed, but so effectually hidden that Omar himself might be puzzled to find it again.

* * * * *

We shall now take a general survey of the collection, regarding it as an illustrative commentary, by many hands, on various aspects of Persian life and thought. Its keynote is the deep sense of mortality which runs through Persian poetry of all times like a melancholy and haunting refrain. Life is but a single breath, a bubble on the ocean of Non-existence, a flash of light amidst eternal darkness. All things are for ever flitting away, vanishing into the nothingness whence they momentarily emerged. And the world is full of sorrow, so that Omar or another cries out, echoing the Sophoclean $\mu\eta\ \phi\upsilon\nu\alpha\iota$ $\mu\acute{\epsilon}\nu\ \acute{\alpha}\pi\alpha\nu\tau\alpha\ \nu\iota\kappa\tilde{\eta}\ \lambda\acute{o}\gamma\omicron\nu$:

Happy the soul that, having come, soon goes,
But crowned with peace is he that never came!

Over Man—a futile, miserable spectre—broods the shadow of Fortune at her Wheel, moulding the clay puppets and shattering them, poisoning their brief pleasure, and denying them any hope of rest.

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How tyrant-like doth Destiny disdain
To stretch a pitying hand to helpless pain,
But when she stumbles on a bleeding heart,
Stabs deeper yet and slays once more the slain !

This is the leading motive, or at least the groundwork, of most of the *Rubâ'iyât*. As natural corollaries we have either hedonism or mysticism. Exhortations to empty the cup of pleasure, ere it is dashed from our lips, recur with monotonous frequency.

Drink ! close upon the heels of Life comes Death :
Best pass your time in drunkenness or sleep.

"Nay," replies another,

"I dreamed, and heard the voice of Wisdom sing,

'From sleep Joy's lovely rose will never spring.

Have naught to do with Sleep, the spouse of Death :
Drink ! in the tomb there's no awakening.'"

Even the great Persian poets are in some degree the slaves of convention, and draw liberally on the large stock of commonplace sentiments, comparisons, metaphors, and rhetorical finery which their predecessors have made fashionable. It needs a genius, like Hâfiz, to triumph over this artificiality and charm a fresh immortal beauty out of the old themes, although in the *rubâ'i* we commonly find a simpler, franker, and more forcible style than else-

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where. Among the contributors to the Bacchanalian chapter of our anthology few can be said to have struck a distinctive and arresting note. Oppressed by the riddle of Life, they turn in despair to wine as the only means of escape from themselves, and drown all question of Time and Eternity in a brimming cup. It is often impossible to decide whether they mean literal intoxication or mystical 'selflessness,' the same terms being applied to both.

In a lighter vein, we are given reasons for drinking. Wine is the sworn foe of religion: you do right to drink its blood; it is promised in Paradise: why should you abstain from it here? True, it is unlawful, but you must consider by whom it is drunk, also how much, and in whose company. Besides, God has eternally known that you would drink: do you wish to prove Him an ignoramus?

The toper's friends are solemnly enjoined to wash his body in wine, bury it in the tavern, and let his clay stop the mouth of a wine-jar or be shaped into a goblet, so that in death as in life he may absorb 'the old familiar juice.' His apotheosis is quaintly imagined in the following stanza:

O pure elixir, essence crystalline!
In thee I'll soak these crazy bones of mine,
That whosoever sees me from afar
Will cry, "Whence comest thou, good Master Wine?"

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Love, in the ordinary meaning of the word, is scarcely mentioned apart from wine, and is regarded as a pleasing accessory to the latter. Here the *Rubâ'iyât* reflect Persian poetry, in which the treatment of love may be either sensual or sentimental, but seldom betrays any profound emotion. Where we hear the language of true passion, we may be pretty sure that it belongs to, or is borrowed from, the mystical adoration of the Divine Beloved which has inspired the most splendid and sublime lyrics in Persian literature.

As I have pointed out, it is unlikely that Omar, the man of science, the sceptic, the agnostic, had any real sympathy with the fervid mysticism in which many of his contemporaries found consolation for the intolerable burdens of this earthly life. We can more easily believe that he recoiled from its ecstasies with a certain fastidiousness, and let the keen shafts of his wit play ironically on doctrines and practices that were often abused. In Omar's time mysticism had become, to an alarming extent, a cloak for hypocrisy. The fact is recognised and deplored by Sûfî writers of the eleventh and twelfth centuries after Christ. Several quatrains in our collection attack these wolves in sheep's clothing, who preyed upon society while pretending to be religious devotees.

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May the glad noise of revels long ring out!
Perish the sanctimonious and devout!
Be their patched frocks and azure gaberlines
Trod in the tavern by a drunken rout!

But a far greater proportion of *rubâ'is* is concerned with the higher aspects of mysticism, and embodies those characteristic ideas which have dominated Persian poetry during the last nine hundred years. The cardinal doctrine of 'Unification,' which means that nothing truly exists except God, is stated in different ways, for example :

My body's life and strength alone Thou art,
My heart and soul art Thou, O Soul and Heart!
Thou art my being: therefore Thou art I;
And I am Thou, since I in Thee depart.

The Spirit which itself diversely drapes,
As plant or animal, in myriad shapes,
Deem not that it can die: the Essence still
Abides, the visionary Form escapes.

As all phenomena are fleeting shows of the one Reality, so all creeds are pale shadows of the one Religion :

None of the two and seventy sects with mine
Agrees, nor any faith but Love Divine.
Saint, sinner, true believer, infidel,
All aim at Thee: away with name and sign!

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Other quatrains illustrate the well-known Sûfî doctrines that Truth is only to be found within, that heaven and hell are subjective, that one must die to 'self' in order to live in God, that the highest knowledge consists in unconsciousness or ecstasy, and so forth. Apart from the wine-quatrains, which can generally be interpreted either in a literal or an allegorical sense, this section of the anthology, though large and important, is rather less extensive than might have been expected in view of the mystical associations of the *rubâ'i* (due, in the first instance, to the famous Sûfî of Khorâsân, Abû Sa'îd ibn Abi 'l-Khair) and the preponderance of this element in medieval Persian poetry. Omar's reputation as a freethinker and sceptic appears to have checked the ascription to him of purely theosophical utterances.

It is safe, I think, to say that he pondered much on the enigma of Predestination, and that if we could sift the genuine quatrains from the spurious we should find many dealing with this problem, which exercised the minds of Moslems from the earliest times. The Prophet himself was possessed by the conviction that human actions and beliefs are predestined and immutably fixed in advance. Some passages in the Koran imply that Man has freewill, and is responsible for his actions, but the

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fatalistic doctrine, from which Mohammed only departed involuntarily, or when it suited him to do so, held its ground and became a chief article of Moslem orthodoxy. The sect called Mu'tazilites, the Rationalists of Islam, sought to modify the absolute and arbitrary nature of Divine power by asserting Man's liberty to act as he liked, and by vindicating the justice of God, who must do what is best for His creatures. They managed, for a short time during the ninth century A.D., to get not only their principles authorised but their special test, the non-eternity of the Koran, enforced by inquisition. This, however, was a mere episode. The orthodox party very soon obtained the upper hand, which they never again lost. Ash'ari, the father of Moslem Scholasticism, admitted that men have a certain power of choice created in them by God, but this power produces no effect on their actions, inasmuch as these also are created by God. Thus, "a man writes with a pen and a piece of paper. God creates in his mind the will to write ; at the same moment He gives him the power to write, and brings about the apparent motion of the hand, of the pen and the appearance on the paper. No one of these is the cause of the other. God has brought about by creation and annihilation of atoms the requisite combination to produce these appear-

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ances.”¹ Such is the theory enunciated by the Cadi al-Bâqilânî, a celebrated theologian contemporary with Omar.

In reading the *Rubâ'iyât* one hears now and then the voice of pious resignation murmuring that it is idle to grieve for misfortune or quarrel with the eternal decrees of Providence, but oftener by far comes the cry of revolt, asking, “Is this fair play?” and answering itself with defiant laughter or frivolous mockery.

When He first moulded into life my clay,
The works that thence proceed in black array
Full well He knew: no sin but He ordained it;
Why burn me, then, on Resurrection Day?

If God wills not to me what I have willed,
I ne'er can hope to see what I have willed;
And if what He hath willed is always right,
Alas! how wrong must be what I have willed!

Of course the *advocatus Dei* puts in his word:

To call eternal prescience cause of sin
Is the extreme of folly, think the wise.

“That may be,” rejoins the sinner, “but suppose that God is not the author of evil and we ourselves are responsible, does not He owe us a good turn after all?”

¹ D. B. Macdonald, *Muslim Theology*, p. 204.

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My thirst keeps taverns flourishing, and o'er
A thousand broken vows must answer for ;
Yet, if I sin not, who will me forgive ?
All mercy lies at my unrighteous door.

You will tell me that punishment is the wages of sin. Well, if God gives back evil for evil, He behaves like the rest of us. That is not *my* opinion, however.

Tho' pearls of worship I ne'er strung for Thee
Nor cleansed my face of sin's foul stain, I see
Hope Thou mayst yet forgive me all, because
I never counted One as two or three."

This stanza expresses the Murjite doctrine that Man is saved by faith, not by works. Another recalls the Zoroastrian idea that the souls of the pious after death meet their own good thoughts, good words, and good deeds in the form of a beautiful maiden, while an ugly hag represents to the wicked their evil thoughts, evil words, and evil deeds ; but here it is said that men will be actually transformed into a corresponding shape :

Since qualities shall all requited be,
And portioned to thy wisdom thy degree,
Strive after good : on the Last Day thou'lt rise
Clad in the form that fits thy quality.

Professor Browne remarks that "it is not uncommon for Sûfis to describe a man by the form

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with which they profess to identify him in the 'World of Similitudes.' Thus I have heard a Sûfi say to his antagonist, 'I see you in the World of Similitudes as an old toothless fox, desirous of preying upon others, but unable to do so.'"¹

The mollas, ascetics, and zealots are severely castigated :

Those prayer-mat worshippers like asses go,
Bearing the burden of a saintly show.

It is better to be drunk with wine than with spiritual pride. Men waste their time in prayer and fasting, in a mechanical routine of devotion which leaves the heart unmoved :

They pass away, and none brings back the tale,
Of that mysterious world beyond the pale,
Whose portal opes to true beseeching tears
When your glib paternosters naught avail.

Agnosticism finds powerful support in the *Rubâ'iyât*, as readers of FitzGerald's version are aware, but there is no vestige of atheism or materialism.

The good and evil in this mortal state,
The joy and sorrow preordained by fate,
Impute them not to heaven—blind, feeble heaven—
With which compared *thou* art a potentate.

¹ *A Year amongst the Persians*, p. 141.

Introduction

Man, is not he Creation's last appeal,
The light of Wisdom's eye? Behold the wheel
Of universal life as 'twere a ring,
But Man the superscription and the seal!

In this brief sketch of the *Rubā'iyāt* I have indicated the principal ideas—especially the religious ideas—to which not Omar alone, but the national genius of Persia, has given terse and striking expression. Less striking but equally interesting in their way are the maxims bearing on morality and social life. Referring any of my readers who desire information on these topics to Dr Christensen's admirable *Recherches sur les Rubā'iyāt de 'Omar Hayyām* (Heidelberg, 1905), I will conclude with a few examples chosen at random :

If a sage gives you gall, take it ; but if a fool gives you honey, spill it on the ground.

Uncongenial company is Hell on earth.

Never drink wine with a low fellow, who is ill-tempered and has no intelligence or sense of dignity.

In these days it is best to make few friends.

Put up with annoyance and seek no remedy ; live cheerfully in sorrow's company and do not look for a sympathiser.

Omar Khayyâm

Drink wine and be a robber, if you like : only
do good !

If you make one freeman your slave by kindness,
that is better than to set free a thousand
slaves.

Goodness both to friends and enemies is good.

Do you wish people to kiss the sole of your foot ?
Get fame : all bow down to reputation.

X Better not eat than eat of everything ; better live
alone than associate with everyone.

Though money is not the capital of wise men,
the garden of the world is a prison to the penniless.

If a man hath a loaf of bread every two days and
a sip of water from a broken jug, why should he be
the master of his inferiors or the servant of his
equals ?

III

FITZGERALD'S VERSION OF THE RUBÂ'İYÂT

I do not propose to discuss the literary history
of FitzGerald's poem—a subject which has been
exhaustively treated by Mr Heron-Allen in the
introduction to his edition of the Bodleian MS.—
but shall make a few remarks on its relation to the

Introduction

Persian original and on the question how far, and in what sense, it may be called a translation.

The Persian collection, as we have seen, consists of a large number of independent quatrains, arranged in the order of their rhymes and totally unconnected with each other: they are not even the work of one author, or of a single epoch, but extend over half a millennium of time and embody the divergent and contradictory points of view of a hundred different writers. Here, then, is an essential distinction between the Persian and English quatrains attributed to Omar Khayyâm. The latter, as FitzGerald says, are "most ingeniously tessellated into a sort of Epicurean eclogue in a Persian garden"; and in spite of the varying moods through which it passes, the poem, as a whole, is in perfect harmony with itself and preserves its artistic unity from the first stanza to the last.

It only remains to inquire whether, in other respects, the English version faithfully reproduces the characteristic form and ideas of the original.

As regards the form, FitzGerald, of course, has not attempted the Sisyphean task of imitating the metres of the Persian *rubâ'î*, but he has given us as near an equivalent as is possible in English—at any

Omar Khayyâm

rate, in English poetry : a stanza of four iambic lines, of which the third one is generally unrhymed, while the first, second, and fourth rhyme together. If something has been lost, more has been gained. The Persian *rubâ'i*, at its best, expresses a single thought lucidly, concisely, and often epigrammatically : it neither borrows light from what has gone before nor lends any to what comes after : it is like a solitary pearl, *totus teres atque rotundus*. Now, FitzGerald's quatrains, although many of them are outwardly complete in themselves, are not independent units but serve a constructive purpose which has vitally affected their form and character. Even if we found them detached from their setting, we could usually recognise them as parts of an organic whole, and in many cases we should be able to replace them in the proper context. The sense flows on — it seldom overflows — through stanza after stanza, broken here and there by sudden turns and precipitous falls, but never losing its way, and gathering force to the end. Such a poem—"most musical, most melancholy"—far outweighs a collection of isolated quatrains, though every one were of the finest excellence.

FitzGerald based his version upon the *Rubâ'iyât* which he first read in a copy of the Bodleian MS. made by Professor Cowell, and afterwards in the

Introduction

Calcutta edition. It is easy to identify the quatrains which he rendered wholly or partially into English: this has been done by Mr Heron-Allen in the notes to his translation of the Bodleian MS., published in 1898. FitzGerald, writing to Cowell, makes some interesting comments on his own methods as a translator. "It is an amusement to me to take what liberties I like with these Persians, who (as I think) are not poets enough to frighten one from such excursions, and who really do want a little art to shape them." And again: "My translation will interest you from its form, and also in many respects in its detail, very unliteral as it is. Many quatrains are mashed together and something lost, I doubt, of Omar's simplicity, which is so much a virtue in him." . . . "I suppose very few people have ever taken such pains in translation as I have, though certainly not to be literal." These criticisms of the poet on himself are borne out by a comparison of the corresponding Persian and English quatrains. Even in those which follow the original most closely, the translation never approaches verbal fidelity: a translation in any strict sense it is not, but rather, to quote Professor C. E. Norton, "a re-representation of the ideas and images of the original in a form not altogether diverse from their own." FitzGerald, in fact,

Omar Khayyâm

allowed himself a licence which no *translator* could have ventured on : he expanded a line or distich into a whole quatrain ; he pieced together one or more stanzas from passages which he remembered to have read in different *Rubâ'iyât*, or in the works of other Persian poets ; he omitted, added, altered, and in every way did just as he pleased. Some of his stanzas faithfully reproduce the *meaning* of single Persian quatrains, and on the whole his version may be described as a very free and supremely poetical " paraphrase of a syllabus " of the *Rubâ'iyât*, which for him were always Omar's. While it reflects certain characteristic ideas with equal truth and beauty, it is far from being entirely true in spirit to the original—how could it be ? Persian is not a difficult language, but to read Persian religious and philosophical poetry with full understanding of the sense intended by the writer, is an achievement of which few professed scholars are capable, since it requires not only mastery of the language but also intimate acquaintance with the general history of Moslem thought, and in particular with theology and mysticism. Fitzgerald, luckily, did not trouble himself about such matters ; the poetry was what he cared for, and he read it by the light of his own speculations and those of the age in which he lived. This is less

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obvious in the first than in the later versions of the poem. One small but significant example occurs in the fiftieth stanza of the final edition :

A Hair perhaps divides the False and True;
Yes; and a single Alif were the clue—
Could you but find it—to the Treasure-house,
And peradventure to THE MASTER too.

‘Alif,’ the first letter of the Arabic alphabet, has the numerical value of 1, and is used by mystics as a symbol of the Divine Unity. It was undoubtedly so used by the author of the original quatrain (Whinfield, No. 109) :

My soul said, “I desire the mystic knowledge:
Teach me if it be in thy power.”
I said “*Alif*.” She answered, “Say no more;
If one is at home, a single letter is enough.”

That is to say, the first step towards knowing God is to know that God is One ; only realise His Unity, and you know all. ‘Unity,’ in the mystical sense, implies that nothing really exists besides God, that He is the One Being, and that everything else is Not-being, which reflects Being and thereby *appears* to exist.

Now, FitzGerald does not mean that. It is plain from the context that he uses the letter Alif—partly because of its resemblance in shape to a hair.

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—as a picturesque illustration of his argument (or fancy) that a single elementary truth, if it were fully comprehended, might give a clue to perfect knowledge of God and the Universe. He means, I take it, exactly what Tennyson meant when he wrote :

Flower in the crannied wall,
I pluck you out of the crannies,
I hold you here, root and all, in my hand,
Little flower—but *if* I could understand
What you are, root and all, and all in all,
I should know what God and man is.

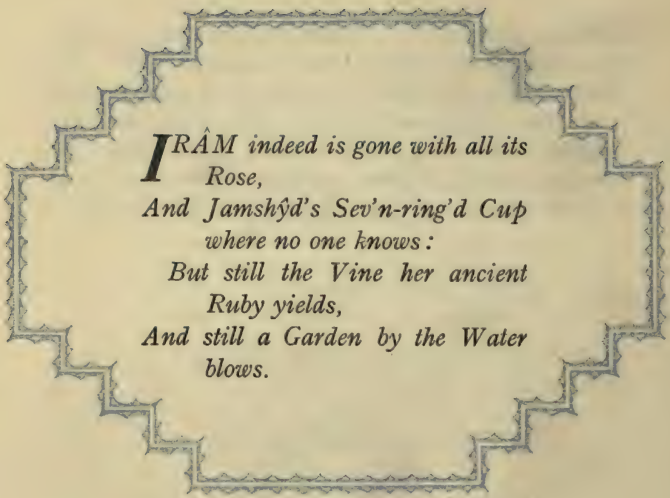
This, it may be said, comes to much the same thing as the other. Very likely ; but the point of view has shifted from the twelfth century to the nineteenth. The unique popularity of FitzGerald's poem was and is in large measure due to the fact that it spoke to a past generation, as it speaks to the present, of modern problems, conflicts, doubts and perplexities, in language coloured by the remote and mysterious charm of medieval Persia.

Concerning the Notes, I need only say that it has been my chief object to explain the Oriental allusions which occur in the poem, and at the same time to call attention to the sources of FitzGerald's inspiration. I have therefore translated (seeking accuracy rather than elegance) a number of the

Introduction

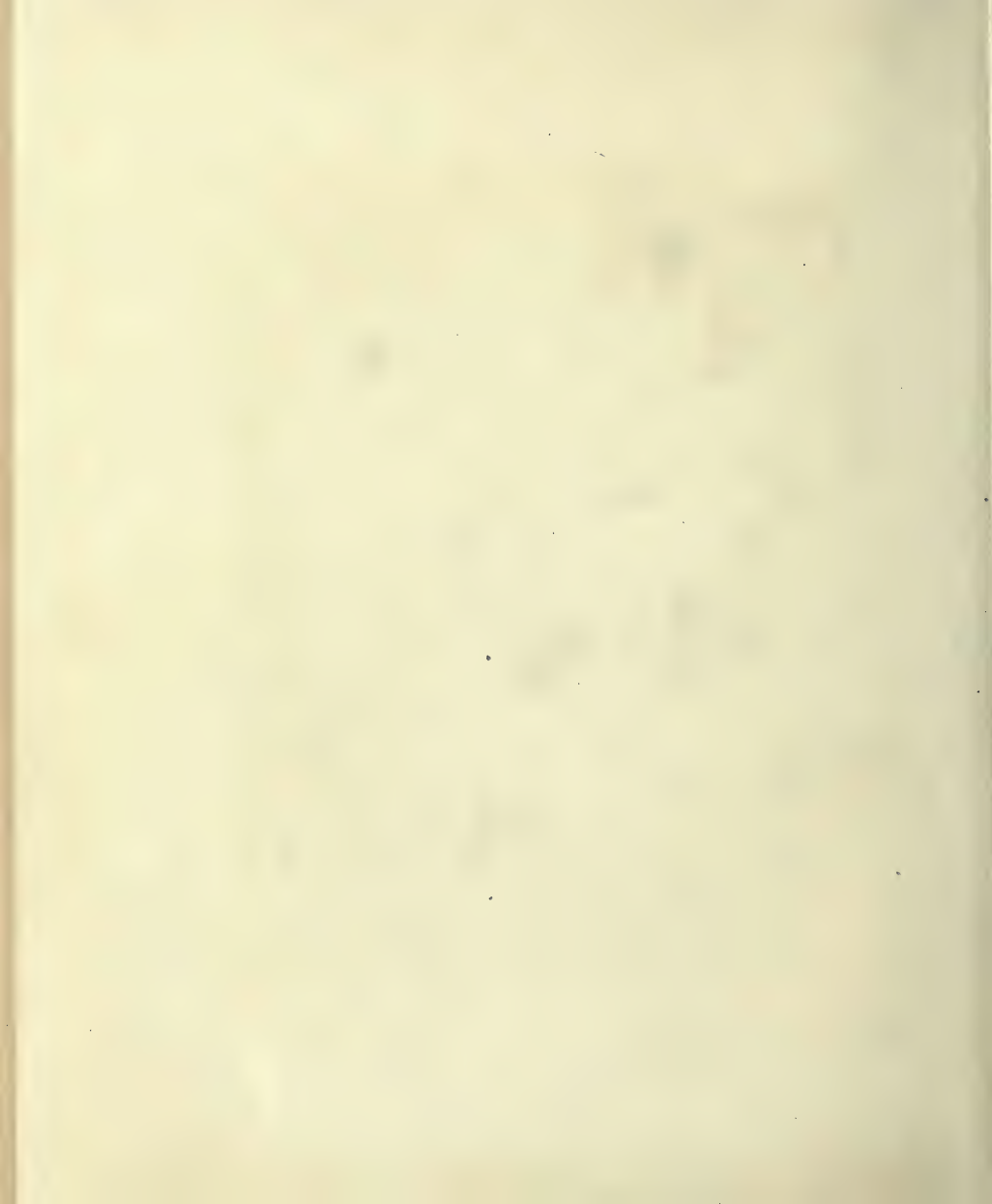
Persian *Rubā'iyāt*. These translations, besides enabling the reader to verify what has been said above as to FitzGerald's method of composition, and the differences between his work and the original, will also, I think, help to elucidate the precise meaning of some passages where the Persian is more direct and transparent than the English.





***I**RÂM indeed is gone with all its
Rose,
And Jamshyd's Sev'n-ring'd Cup
where no one knows:
But still the Vine her ancient
Ruby yields,
And still a Garden by the Water
blows.*






*A*WAKE ! for Morning in the
Bowl of Night

*Has flung the Stone that puts the
Stars to Flight :*

*And Lo ! the Hunter of the East
has caught*

*The Sultân's Turret in a Noose
of Light.*





DREAMING when Dawn's
Left Hand was in the Sky,
I heard a Voice within the Tavern
cry,

"Awake, my Little ones, and fill
the Cup

"Before Life's Liquor in its Cup
be dry."

III

*AND, as the Cock crew, those
who stood before*

*The Tavern shouted—"Open then
the Door !*

*" You know how little while we
have to stay,*

*" And, once departed, may return
no more."*



IV

*N*OW the New Year reviving
old Desires,

The thoughtful Soul to Solitude
retires,

Where the White Hand of Moses
on the Bough

Puts out, and Jesus from the
Ground suspires.



IRÂM indeed is gone with all
its Rose,

And Jamshýd's Sev'n-ring'd Cup
where no one knows :

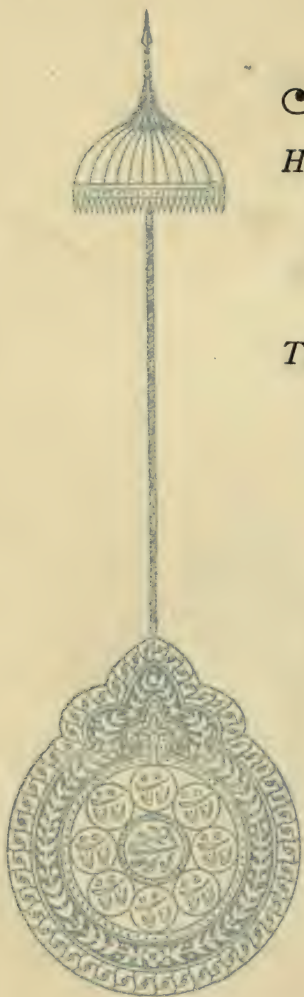
But still the Vine her ancient
Ruby yields,

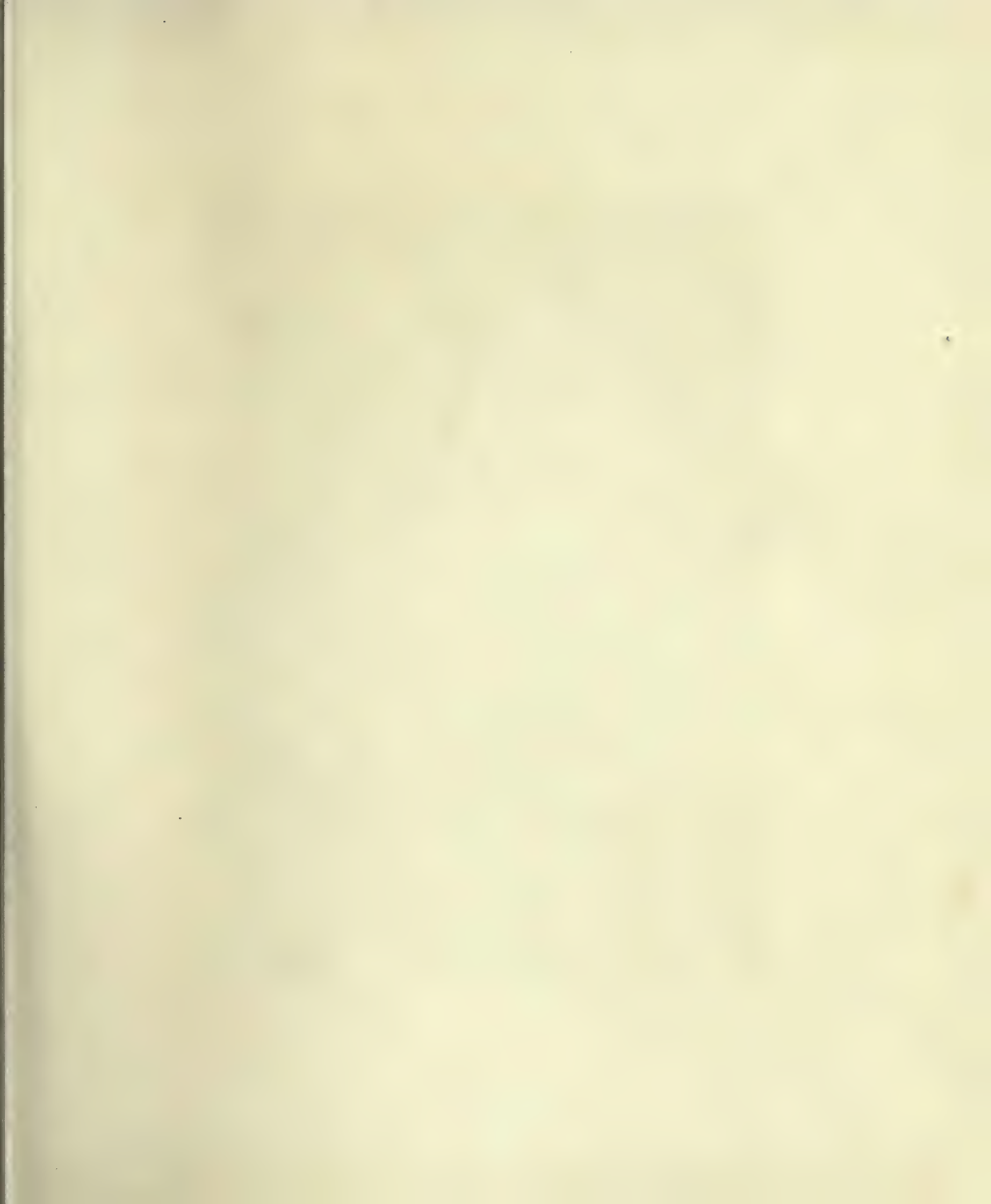
And still a Garden by the Water
blows.



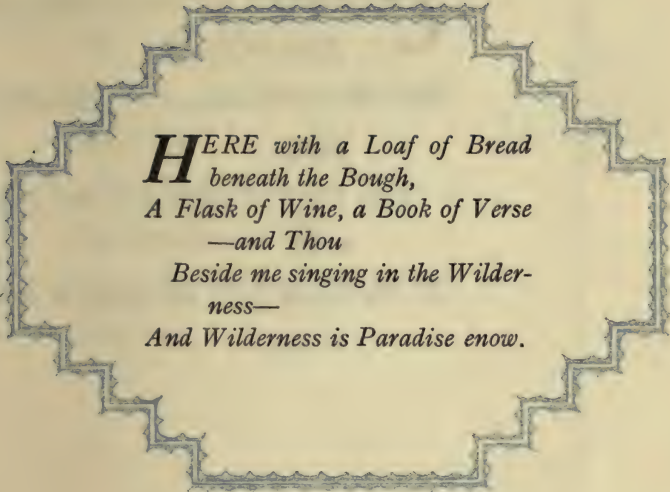
*AND David's Lips are lock't ;
but in divine
High-piping Péhlevî, with " Wine !
Wine ! Wine !*

*" Red Wine ! "—the Nightingale
cries to the Rose
That yellow Cheek of her's to in-
carnadine.*









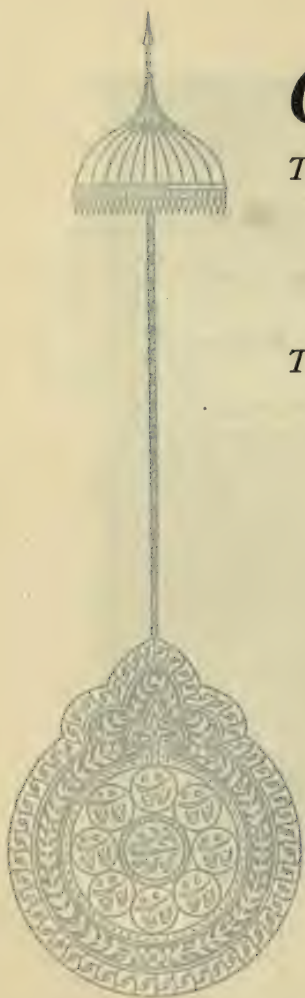
***H**ERE with a Loaf of Bread
beneath the Bough,
A Flask of Wine, a Book of Verse
—and Thou
Beside me singing in the Wilder-
ness—
And Wilderness is Paradise enow.*

COME, fill the Cup, and in the
Fire of Spring

The Winter Garment of Repentance
fling :

The Bird of Time has but a little
way

To fly—and Lo ! the Bird is on the
Wing.



VIII

*AND look—a thousand Blossoms with the Day
Woke—and a thousand scatter'd
into Clay :*

*And this first Summer Month
that brings the Rose
Shall take Jamshy'd and Kaikobâd
away.*



BUT come with old Khayyâm
and leave the Lot

Of Kaikobâd and Kaikhosrû forgot :

Let Rustum lay about him as he
will,

Or Hâtim Tai cry Supper—heed
them not.

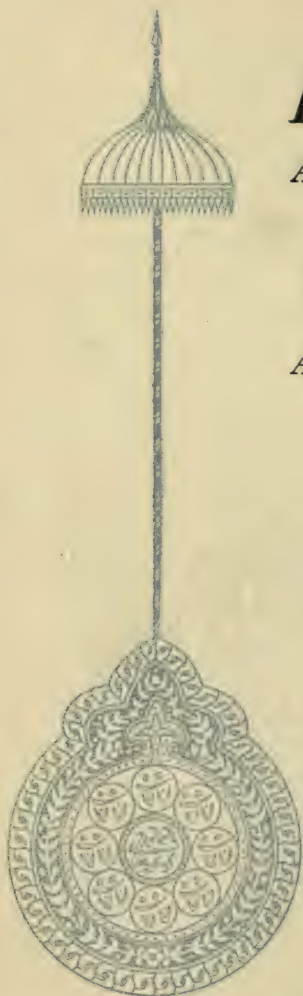


X

*WITH me along some Strip of
Herbage strown
That just divides the desert from the
sown,
Where name of Slave and Sultân
scarce is known,
And pity Sultân Mahmûd on his
Throne.*



***H**ERE with a Loaf of Bread
 beneath the Bough,
 A Flask of Wine, a Book of Verse
 —and Thou
 Beside me singing in the Wilder-
 ness—
 And Wilderness is Paradise enow.*



XII

HOW sweet is mortal Sovranty"
—think some :

Others—"How blest the Paradise
to come !"

Ah, take the Cash in hand and
waive the Rest ;

Oh, the brave Music of a distant
Drum !

*paradise
empty sound*



XIII

LOOK to the Rose that blows
about us—"Lo,
"Laughing," she says, "into the
World I blow ;

"At once the silken Tassel of my
Purse

"Tear, and its Treasure on the
Garden throw."



K

XIV

THE Worldly Hope men set
 their Hearts upon
 Turns Ashes—or it prospers ; and
 anon,
 Like Snow upon the Desert's
 dusty Face
 Lighting a little Hour or two—is
 gone.

transience



*AND those who husbanded the
Golden Grain,*

*And those who flung it to the Winds
like Rain,*

*Alike to no such aureate Earth
are turn'd*

*As, buried once, Men want dug up
again.*



*my edition to
first of men*

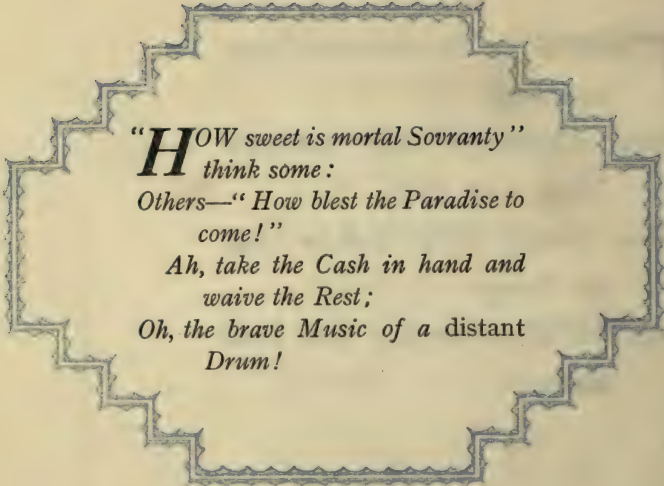
THINK, in this batter'd Cara-
vanserai

Whose Doorways are alternate
Night and Day,

How Sultân after Sultân with
his Pomp

Abode his Hour or two, and went
his way.





*"HOW sweet is mortal Sovranty"
think some :*

*Others—"How blest the Paradise to
come!"*

*Ah, take the Cash in hand and
waive the Rest ;*

*Oh, the brave Music of a distant
Drum !*





822

THEY say the Lion and the
Lizard keep

The Courts where Jamshyd gloried
and drank deep :

And Bahrâm, that great Hunter
—the Wild Ass

Stamps o'er his Head, and he lies
fast asleep.

W. G. W.

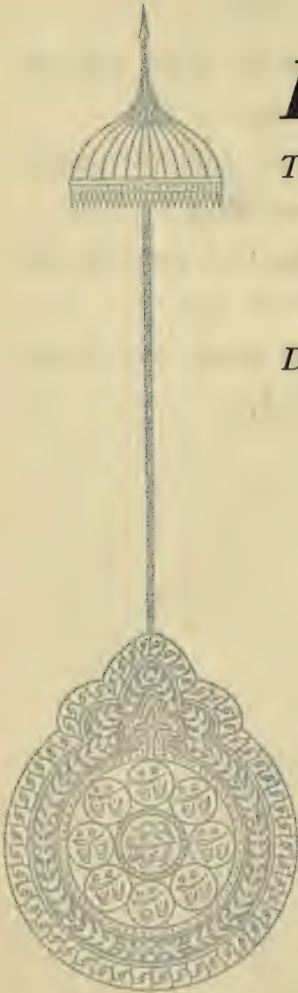


*SOMETIMES think that never
blows so red*

*The Rose as where some buried
Caesar bled ;*

*That every Hyacinth the Garden
wears*

*Dropt in its Lap from some once
lovely Head.*



XIX

*AND this delightful Herb whose
tender Green*

*Fledges the River's Lip on which
we lean—*

*Ah, lean upon it lightly! for
who knows*

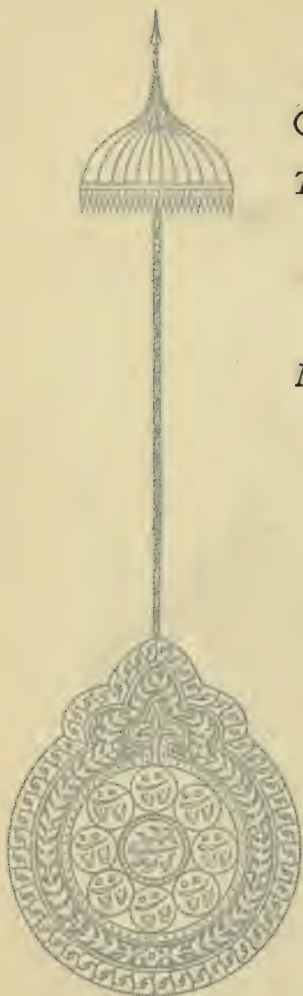
*From what once lovely Lip it
springs unseen!*



*A*H, my Belovèd, fill the cup
that clears

*To-day of past Regrets and future
Fears—*

*To-Morrow?—Why, To-morrow
I may be
Myself with Yesterday's Sev'n
Thousand Years.*



XXI

*L*O! some we loved, the loveliest
and the best
That Time and Fate of all their
Vintage prest,
Have drunk their Cup a Round
or two before,
And one by one crept silently to
Rest.



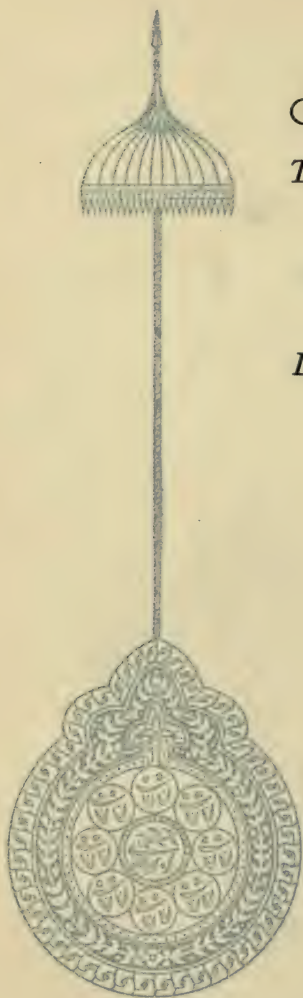
*AND we, that now make merry
in the Room*

*They left, and Summer dresses in
new Bloom,*

*Ourselves must we beneath the
Couch of Earth*

*Descend, ourselves to make a Couch
—for whom ?*

Yeats



XXIII

*A^H, make the most of what we
yet may spend,*

Before we too into the Dust descend ;

*Dust into Dust, and under Dust,
to lie,*

*Sans Wine, sans Song, sans Singer,
and—sans End !*

epigrammatic layer



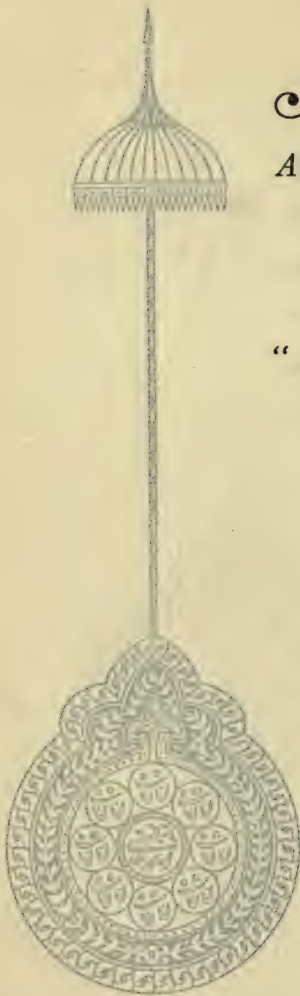
*ALIKE for those who for To-
day prepare*

*And those that after a To-morrow
stare,*

*A Muezzin from the Tower of
Darkness cries—*

*“Fools! your Reward is neither
Here nor There!”*

*more
apostolic
than
the m. f. v.*



WHY, all the Saints and Sages
 who discuss'd

Of the Two Worlds so learnedly, are
 thrust

Like foolish Prophets forth ; their
 Words to Scorn

Are scatter'd, and their Mouths are
 stopt with Dust.

*Worthy
 rejects follow me*



OH, come with old Khayyâm,
and leave the Wise

To talk ; one thing is certain, that
Life flies ;

One thing is certain, and the
Rest is Lies ;

The Flower that once has blown for
ever dies.

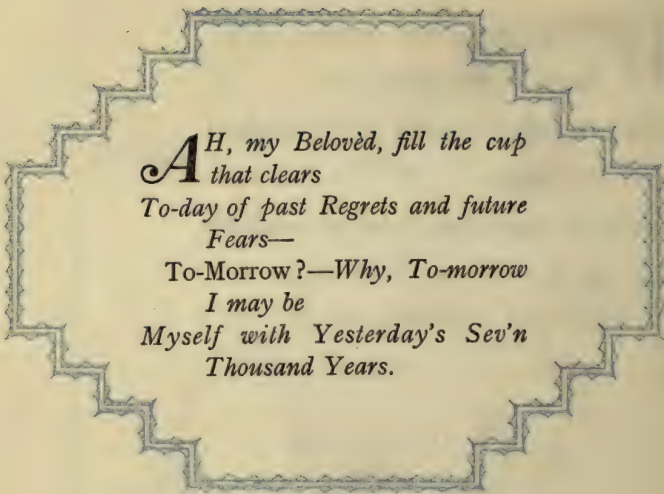


MYSELF when young did
eagerly frequent

*Doctor and Saint, and heard great
Argument*

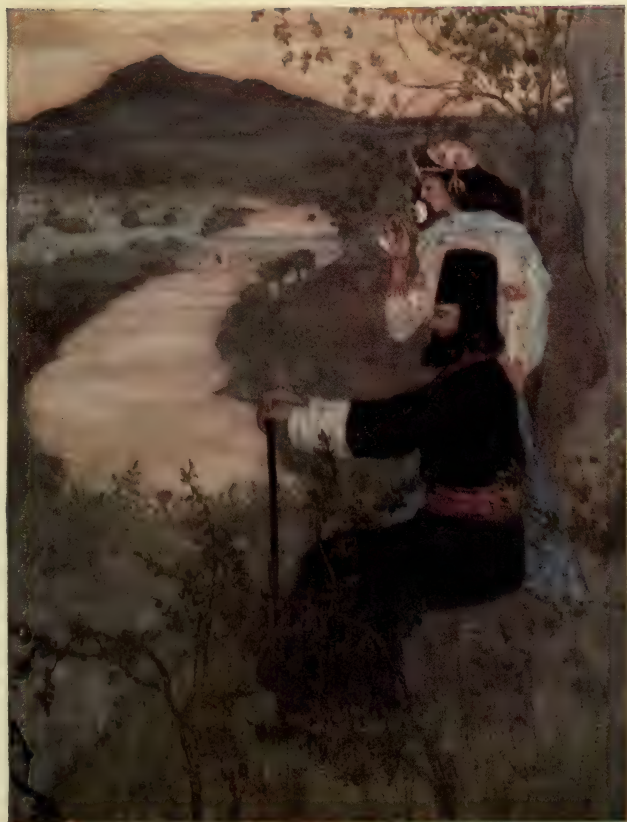
*About it and about ; but evermore
Came out by the same Door as in
I went.*





*A*H, my Belovèd, fill the cup
that clears
To-day of past Regrets and future
Fears—

To-Morrow?—Why, To-morrow
I may be
Myself with Yesterday's Sev'n
Thousand Years.



*WITH them the Seed of Wis-
dom did I sow,*

*And with my own hand labour'd it
to grow ;*

*And this was all the Harvest that
I reap'd—*

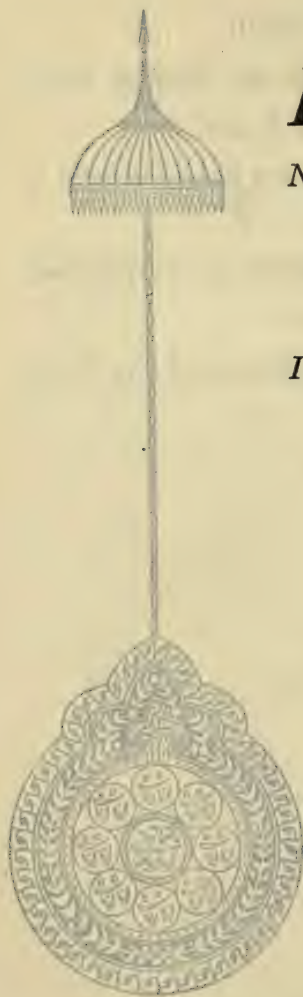
*“ I came like Water, and like Wind
I go.”*

*from the
earth*

into the air



INTO this Universe, and why not
knowing,
Nor whence, like Water willy-nilly
flowing ;
And out of it, as Wind along the
Waste,
I know not whither, willy-nilly
blowing.



XXX

*WHAT, without asking, hither
hurried whence ?*

*And, without asking, whither
hurried hence !*

*Another and another Cup to
drown*

The Memory of this Impertinence !



*UP from Earth's Centre through
the Seventh Gate*

*I rose, and on the Throne of Saturn
sate,*

*And many Knots unravel'd by
the Road ;*

*But not the Knot of Human Death
and Fate.*



*T*HERE was a Door to which
I found no Key :

*There was a Veil past which I could
not see ;*

*Some little Talk awhile of Me and
Thee*

*There seemed—and then no more
of Thee and Me.*



*THEN to the rolling Heav'n
itself I cried,*

*Asking, "What Lamp had Destiny
to guide*

*"Her little Children stumbling in
the Dark?"*

*And—"A blind Understanding!"
Heav'n replied.*



THEN to this earthen Bowl did
I adjourn

My Lip the secret Well of Life to
learn :

And Lip to Lip it murmur'd—

“ While you live

“ Drink !—for once dead you never
shall return.”



XXV

I THINK the Vessel, that with
fugitive

Joy

Articulation answer'd, once did live,

And merry-make ; and the cold

Lip I kiss'd

How many Kisses might it take—
and give !



XXXVI

FOR in the Market-place, one
Dusk of Day,

I watch'd the Potter thumping his
Wet Clay :

And with its all obliterated
Tongue

It murmur'd — “ Gently, Brother,
gently, pray ! ”

*Deal with me kindly
since I'm a man*



refrain

AH, fill the Cup:—what boots
it to repeat

How Time is slipping underneath
our Feet:

Unborn To-morrow and dead
Yesterday,

Why fret about them if To-day be
sweet!

How can

*ONE Moment in Annihilation's
Waste,
One Moment, of the Well of Life to
taste—*

*The Stars are setting and the
Caravan
Starts for the Dawn of Nothing—
Oh, make haste !*

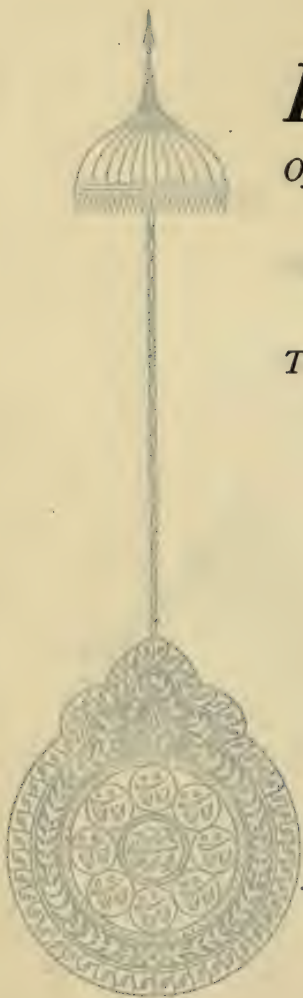


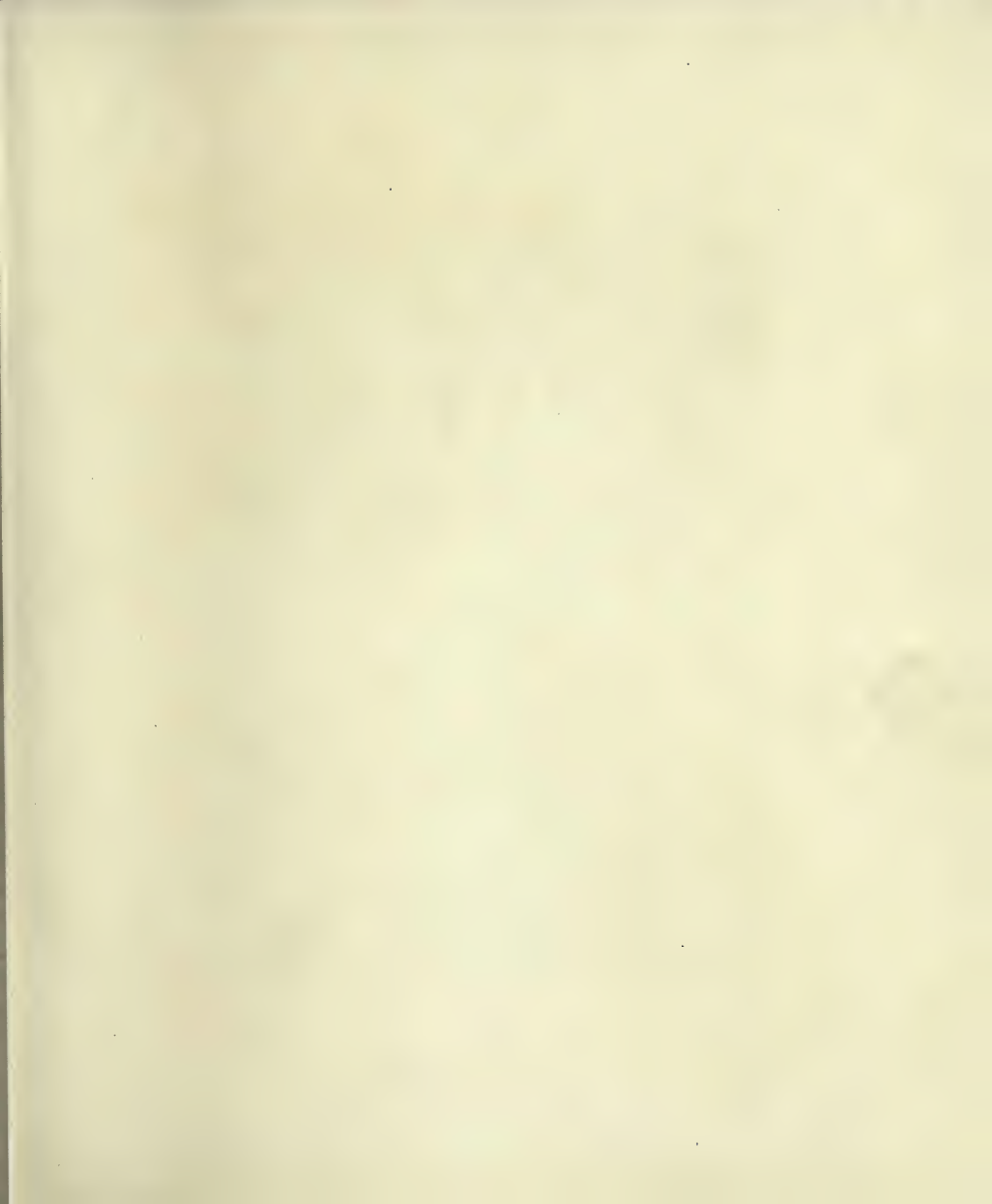
HOW long, how long, in definite
Pursuit

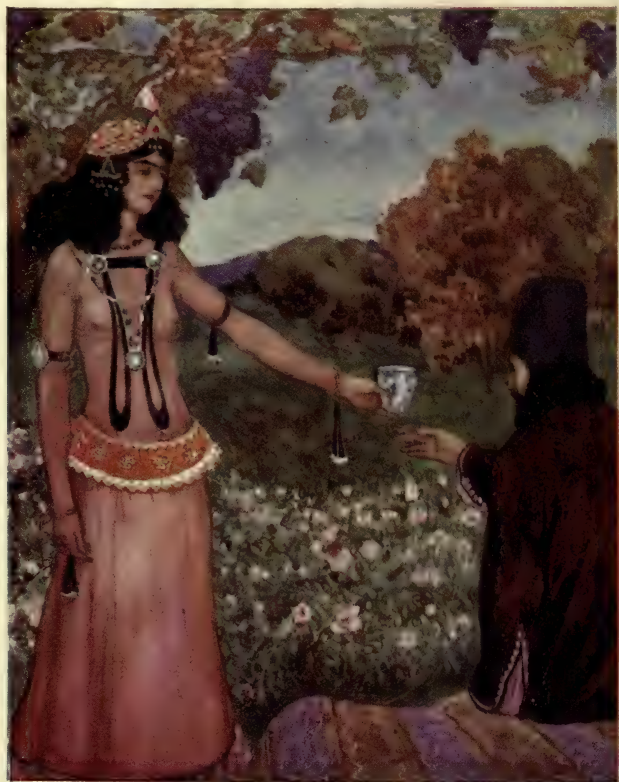
Of This and That endeavour and
dispute ?

Better be merry with the fruitful
Grape

Than sadden after none, or bitter,
Fruit.









*AH, fill the Cup:—what boots
it to repeat*

*How Time is slipping underneath
our Feet:*

*Unborn To-morrow and dead
Yesterday,*

*Why fret about them if To-day be
sweet!*

YOU know, my Friends, how
long since in my House
For a new Marriage I did make
Carouse :

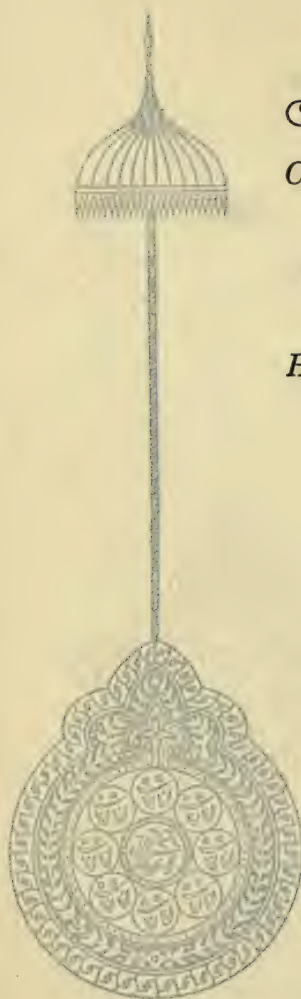
Divorced old barren Reason from
my Bed,
And took the Daughter of the Vine
to Spouse.



***F**OR "Is" and "Is-not" though
with Rule and Line,
And "Up-and-down" without, I
could define,
I yet in all I only cared to know,
Was never deep in anything but—
Wine.*



*AND lately, by the Tavern
Door agape,
Came stealing through the Dusk an
Angel Shape
Bearing a Vessel on his Shoulder ;
and
He bid me taste of it ; and 'twas—
the Grape !*



XLIII

*THE Grape that can with Logic
absolute*

*The Two-and-Seventy jarring Sects
confute :*

*The subtle Alchemist that in a
Trice*

*Life's leaden Metal ino Gold trans-
mute.*



THE mighty Mahmūd, the vic-
torious Lord,

That all the misbelieving and black
Horde

Of Fears and Sorrows that infest
the Soul

Scatters and slays with his en-
chanted Sword.



***B**UT leave the Wise to wrangle
 and with me,
 The Quarrel of the Universe let be :
 And, in some corner of the
 Hubbub coucht,
 Make Game of that which makes
 as much of Thee.*



FOR in and out, above, about,
below,

'Tis nothing but a Magic Shadow-
show,

Play'd in a Box whose Candle is
the Sun,

Round which we Phantom Figures
come and go.

Shadow-
Theater is but a stage
where we but play
there upon



XLVII

*AND if the Wine you drink,
the Lip you press,
End in the Nothing all Things end
in—Yes—*

*Then fancy while Thou art, Thou
art but what
Thou shalt be — Nothing — Thou
shalt not be less.*





*WHILE the Rose blows along
the River Brink,
With old Khayyâm the Ruby
Vintage drink :*

*And when the Angel with his
darker Draught
Draws up to Thee—take that, and
do not shrink.*

*garden
I was of the town
cultivate the rose
and around the town*



XLIX

'*T*IS all a Chequer-board of
Nights and Days
Where Destiny with Men for Pieces
plays ;

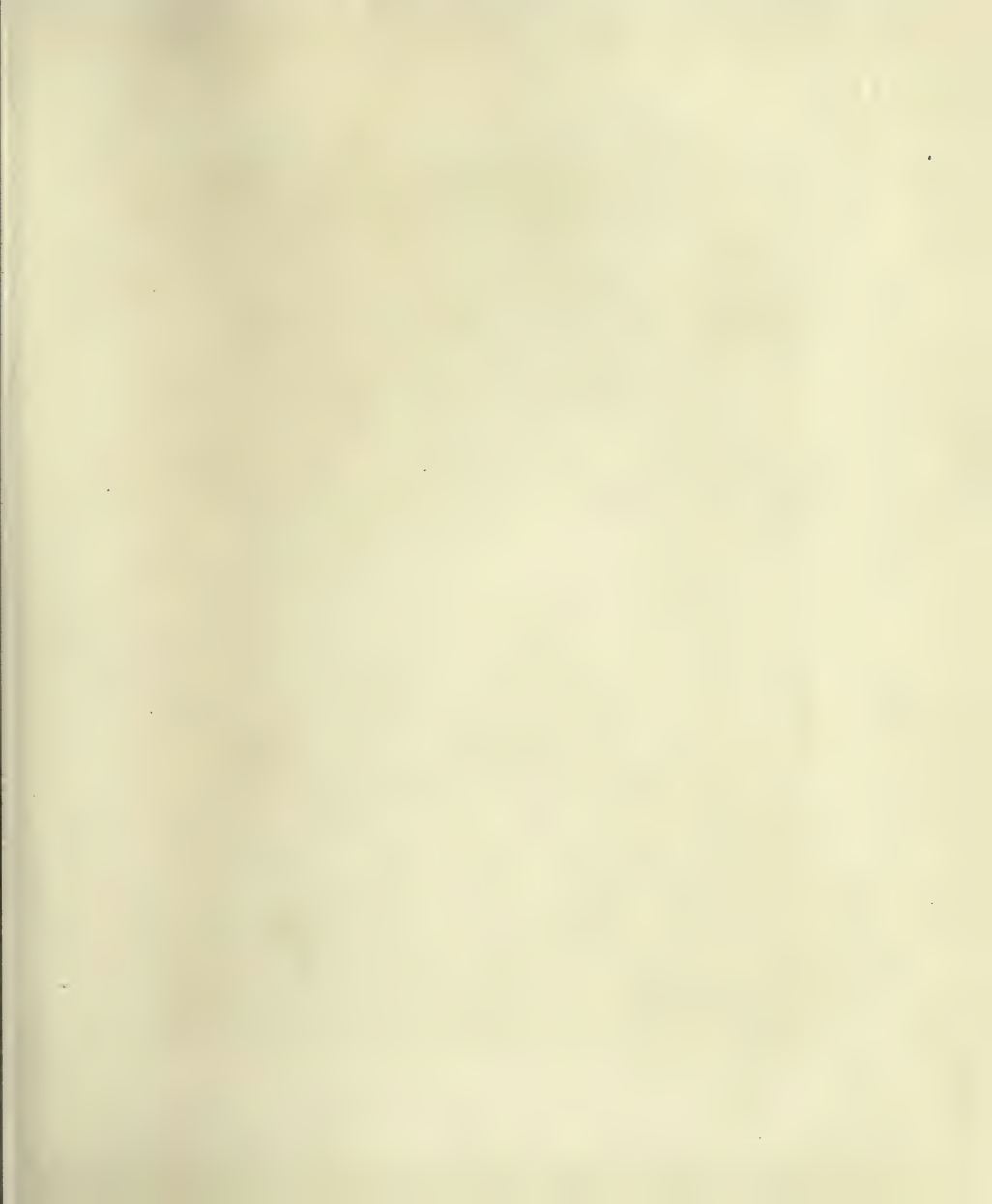
Hither and thither moves, and
mates, and slays
And one by one back in the Closet
lays.



L

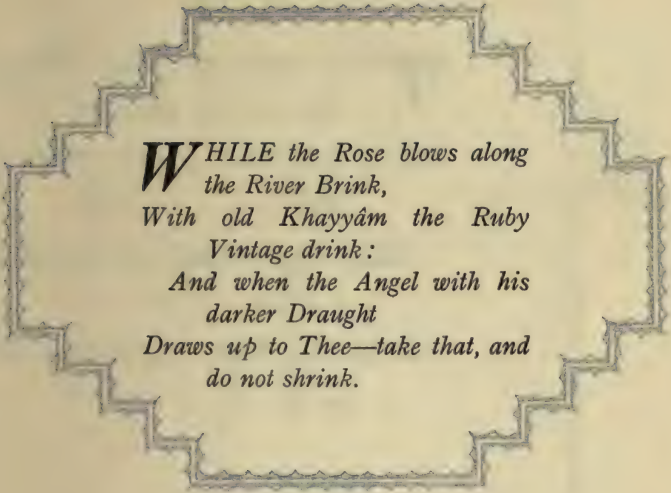
*THE Ball no Question makes
of Ayes and Noes,
But Right or Left as strikes the
Player goes ;
And He that toss'd Thee down
into the Field,
He knows about it all—He knows
—HE knows !*







GILBERT SARGENT



*WHILE the Rose blows along
the River Brink,
With old Khayyâm the Ruby
Vintage drink:
And when the Angel with his
darker Draught
Draws up to Thee—take that, and
do not shrink.*

THE Moving Finger writes;
and having writ,

Moves on: nor all thy Piety nor
Wit

Shall lure it back to cancel half
a Line,

Nor all thy Tears wash out a word
of it.



*AND that inverted Bowl we
call The Sky,*

*Whereunder crawling coop't we live
and die,*

*Lift not thy hands to It for help
—for It*

Rolls impotently on as Thou or I.



LIII

*WITH Earth's first Clay They
did the last Man's knead,
And then of the Last Harvest sow'd
the Seed :*

*Yea, the first Morning of Crea-
tion wrote
What the Last Dawn of Reckoning
shall read.*



I TELL Thee this—When, start-
ing from the Goal,
Over the shoulders of the flaming
Foal
Of Heav'n Parwîn and Mushtarî
they flung,
In my predestin'd Plot of Dust and
Soul.



THE Vine had struck a Fibre ;
 which about
 If clings my Being—let the Sûfi
 flout ;

Of my Base Metal may be filed
 a Key,
 That shall unlock the Door he
 howls without.



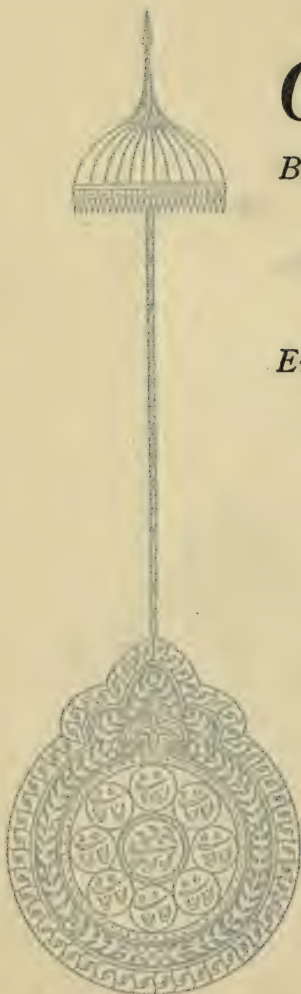
*AND this I know : whether the
one True Light,
Kindle to Love, or Wrath consume
me quite,
One Glimpse of It within the
Tavern caught
Better than in the Temple lost out-
right.*



*O*H, Thou, who did'st with Pit-
fall and with Gin
Beset the Road I was to wander
in,

*Thou wilt not with Predestination
round*

*Enmesh me, and impute my Fall
to Sin ?*



LVIII

OH, Thou, who Man of baser
 Earth did'st make,
 And who with Eden did'st devise
 the Snake ;
 For all the Sin wherewith the
 Face of Man
 Is blacken'd, Man's Forgiveness
 give—and take !

.



KÛZA—NÂMA

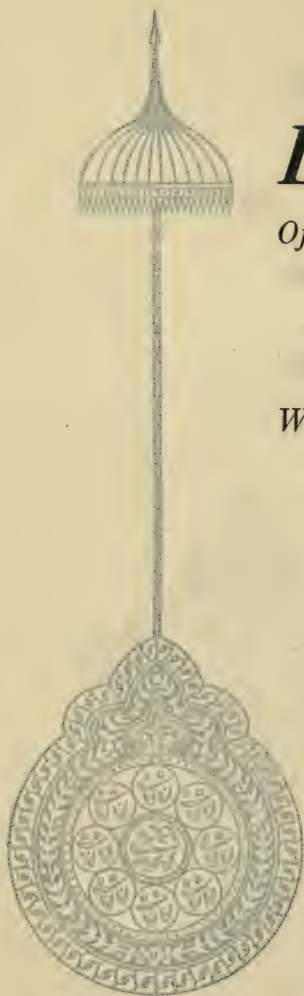
LIX

LISTEN again. One Evening
at the Close

Of Ramazân, ere the better Moon
arose,

In that old Potter's Shop I stood
alone

With the clay Population round in
Rows.



all
sp
together

*AND, strange to tell, among the
Earthen Lot*

*Some could articulate, while others
not :*

*And suddenly one more impatient
cried—*

*“ Who is the Potter, pray, and who
the Pot ? ”*



THEN said another — “Surely
not in vain

“ My substance from the common
Earth was ta'en,

“ That He who subtly wrought
me into Shape

“ Should stamp me back to com-
mon Earth again.”



ANOTHER said — “ Why,
ne’er a peevish Boy,

“ Would break the Bowl from which
he drank in Joy ;

“ Shall He that made the Vessel
in pure Love

“ And Fancy, in an after Rage
destroy ? ”



NONE answer'd this ; but
after Silence spake

A Vessel of a more ungainly Make :

“ They sneer at me for leaning
all awry ;

“ What ! did the Hand then of the
Potter shake ? ”



*S*AID one—"Folks of a surly
Tapster tell,
"And daub his Visage with the
Smoke of Hell ;
"They talk of some strict Testing
of us—Pish !
"He's a Good Fellow, and 'twill all
be well."



*THEN said another with a
long-drawn Sigh,*

*" My Clay with long oblivion is
gone dry :*

*" But, fill me with the old familiar
Juice,*

*" Methinks I might recover by and
by."*



*SO while the Vessels one by one
were speaking,*

*One spied the little Crescent all
were seeking,*

And then they jogg'd each other,

" Brother, Brother !

*" Hark to the Porter's Shoulder-
knot a-creaking ! "*

.



*A*H, with the Grape my fading
Life provide,
And wash my Body whence the
Life has died,
And in a Winding sheet of Vine-
leaf wrapt,
So bury me by some sweet Garden-
side.



LXVIII

THAT ev'n my buried Ashes
such a Snare

Of Perfume shall fling up into the
Air,

As not a True Believer passing
by

But shall be overtaken unaware.

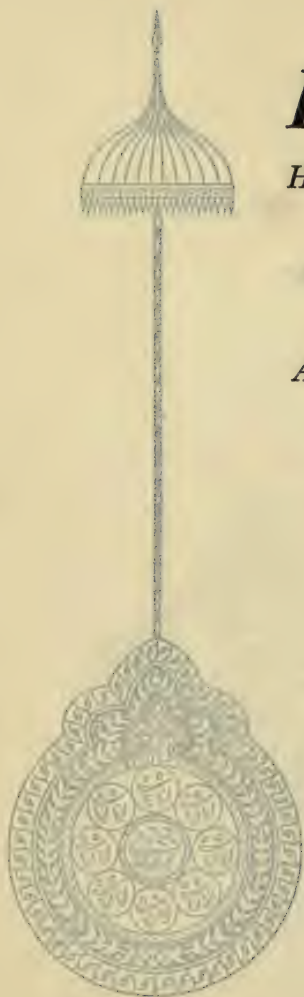


INDEED the Idols I have loved
so long

Have done my Credit in Men's
Eye much wrong!

Have drown'd my Honour in a
shallow Cup,

And sold my Reputation for a
Song.



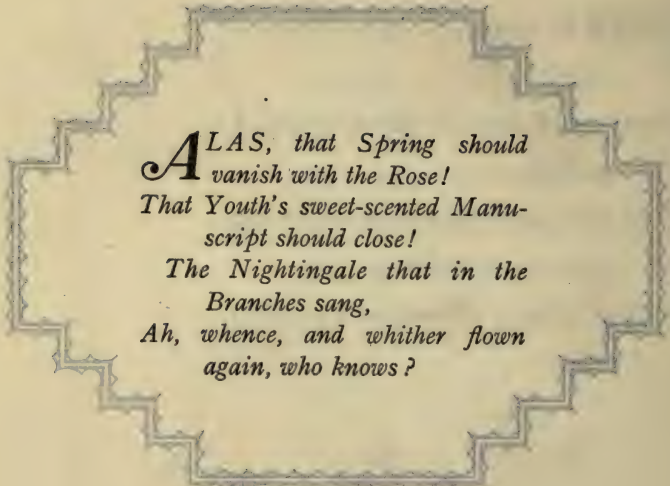
INDEED, indeed, Repentance oft
before

I swore—but was I sober when I
swore ?

And then and then came Spring,
and Rose-in-hand

My thread-bare Penitence a pieces
tore.





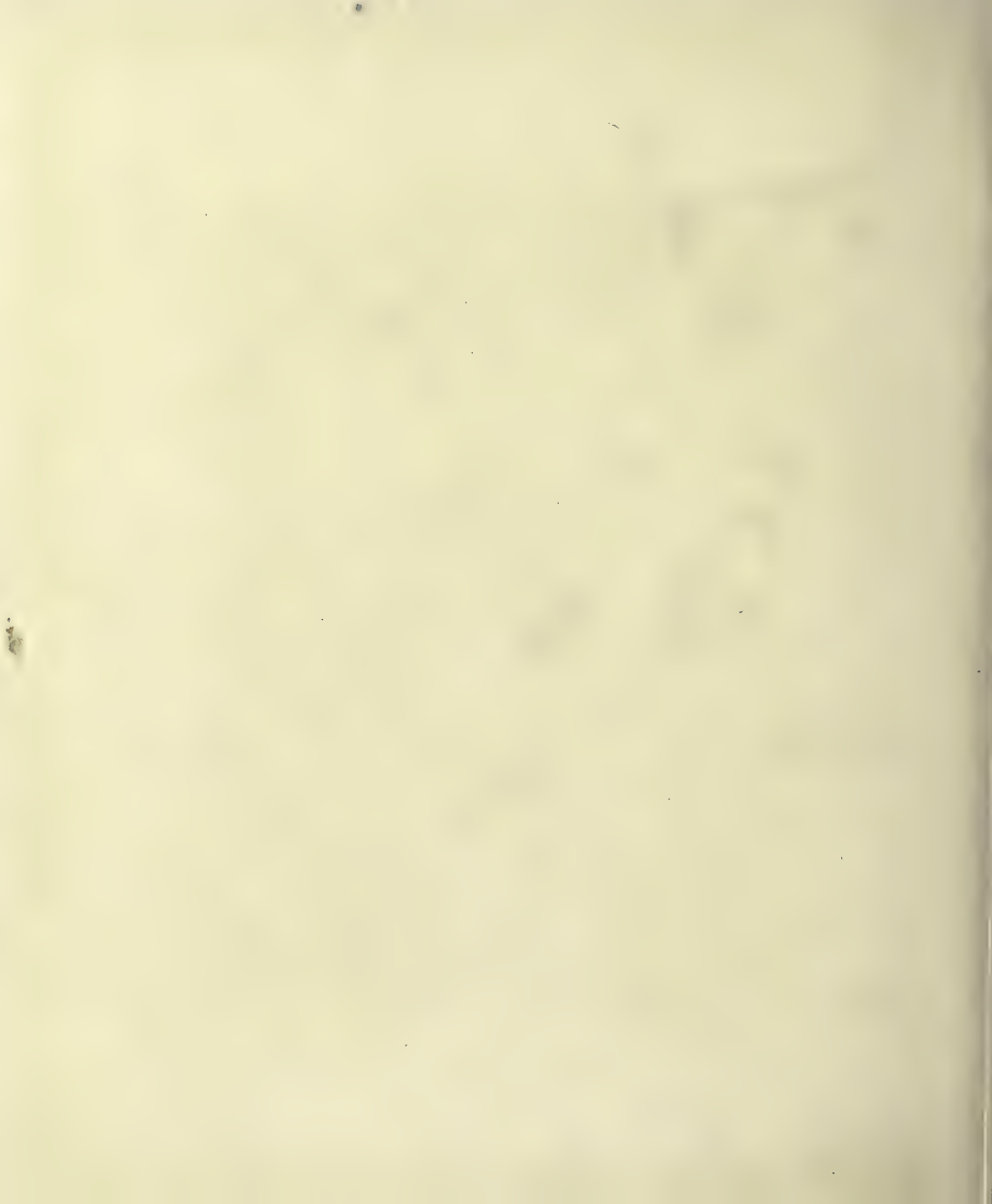
*ALAS, that Spring should
vanish with the Rose!*


*That Youth's sweet-scented Manu-
script should close!*

*The Nightingale that in the
Branches sang,*

*Ah, whence, and whither flown
again, who knows?*







*AND much as Wine has play'd
the Infidel,
And robb'd me of my Robe of
Honour—well,
I often wonder what the Vintners
buy
One half so precious as the Goods
they sell.*

*ALAS, that Spring should
vanish with the Rose!*

That Youth's sweet-scented Manuscript should close!

*The Nightingale that in the
Branches sang,*

*Ah, whence, and whither flown
again, who knows?*



*A*H, Love! could thou and I
with Fate conspire
To grasp this sorry Scheme of
Things entire,
Would not we shatter it to bits—
and then
Re-mould it nearer to the Heart's
Desire?



*A*H, Moon of my Delight who
know'st no wane,
The Moon of Heav'n is rising once
again :

How oft hereafter rising shall she
look
Through this same Garden after me
—in vain !



*AND when Thysself with shin-
 ing Foot shall pass
 Among the Guests star-scatter'd on
 the Grass,
 And in thy joyous Errand reach
 the Spot
 Where I made one—turn down an
 empty Glass !*

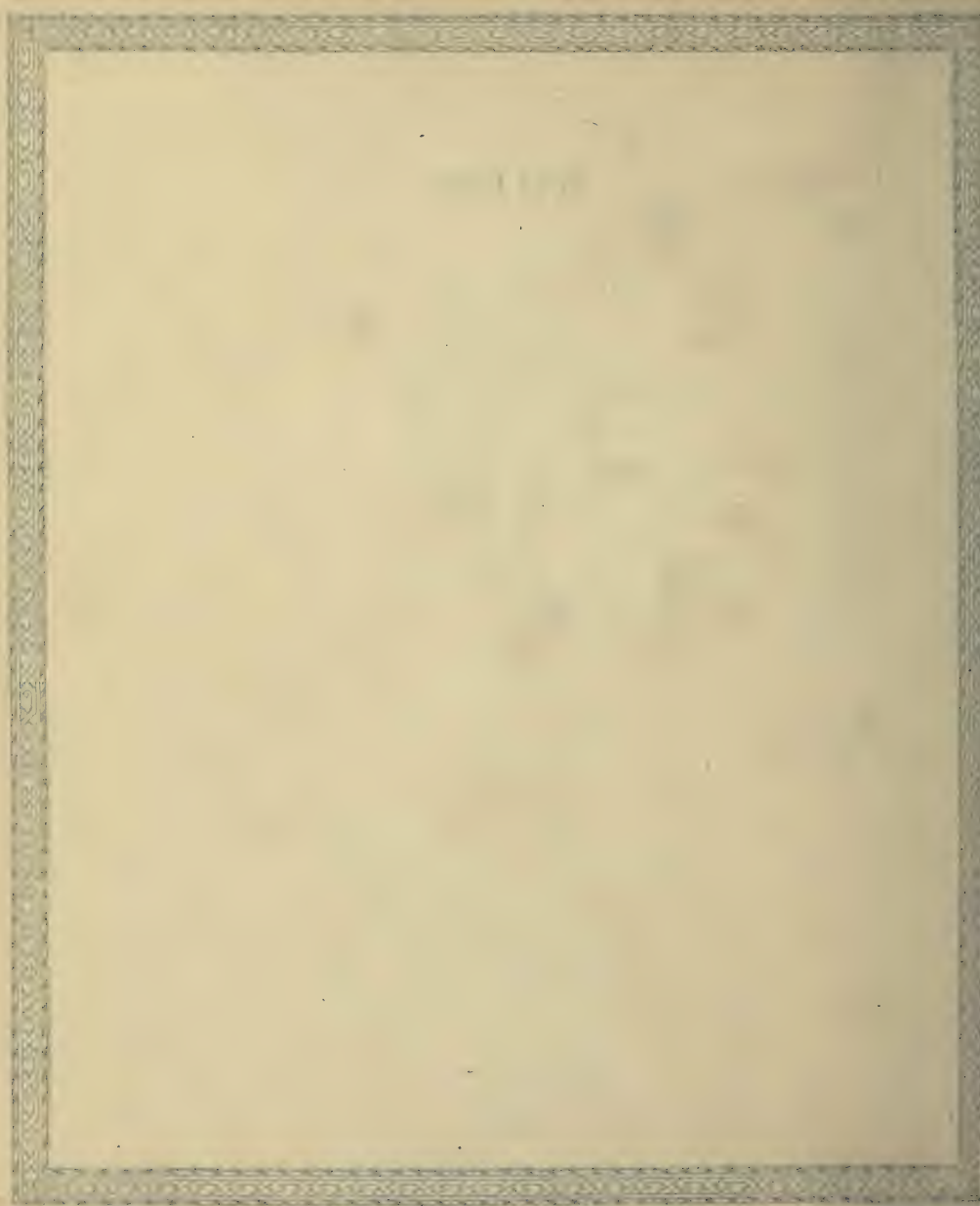
TAMÂM SHUD.



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NOTES





NOTES

I

Among some nomadic tribes the signal for striking camp was given by casting a stone into a bowl. Cf. W. 233 :¹

"The Sun has thrown the noose of Dawn upon the roof,
The monarch of Day has thrown wine into the cup
(filled the cup-like sky with ruddy light)."

II

"Dawn's Left Hand" is the shaft or column of light formed by the beams of the sun before it has risen above the horizon. The hour of twilight preceding sunrise is called 'False Morning,' or 'Wolf's Tail' (cf. Greek *λυφώρας*), alluding, as the lexicologists say, to its length and greyness.

IV

The Persian New Year begins at the vernal equinox, about the 21st of March. It marks the advent of Spring and is celebrated by a joyous festival.

"The White Hand of Moses" refers to a verse of the Koran (vii. 105, xxvi. 32): "*And he drew forth his hand, and lo! it appeared white to those who looked.*" Cf. Exodus iv. 6. In Persian poetry 'hand' (*dast* or *kaf*) often means 'leaf.'

"And Jesus from the Ground suspires," *i.e.* the plants shoot up, as though miraculously revived by the life-giving breath of Jesus, whom Moslems call 'the Spirit of God' (*Rāhu 'Ilāh*).

V

'Iram,' with the epithet 'many-columned,' is mentioned in the Koran (lxxxix. 6) in connection with the prehistoric

¹ W.=E. H. Whinfield, *The Quatrains of Omar Khayyam*, 2nd ed., 1901.

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people of 'Âd, whom God destroyed for their sins, and is variously explained by the Arabic commentators. The Prophet may have had in his mind the ruined colonnades and desolate grandeur of some Syrian town. According to one story, Iram was built on the site afterwards occupied by Damascus, but most authors place it in the desert of Aden, where it still stands invisible though God now and then reveals a glimpse of it to the passing traveller. The poets imagine it as a magnificent Garden-city, an earthly Paradise adorned with superb pavilions and palaces.

Jamshîd, called in the Avesta "the fair Yima of goodly flocks," was a Persian king of the legendary Pishdâdî dynasty. The Persians believe that he founded Persepolis, which they accordingly name 'The Throne of Jamshîd.' He is said to have possessed a wonderful cup, round the interior of which were engraved seven lines or rings. Each of these rings depicted one of the seven divisions of the globe: hence the poets often speak of Jamshîd's 'world-displaying cup.'

VI

Following the example of the Prophet, who on hearing the Koran sweetly recited in his presence declared that the reader had 'the voice of David,' Moslems regard the Psalmist as the type of a melodious singer.

The term 'Pehlevî' is generally applied in Europe to the Persian script and literature of the Sâsânian period (226-652 A.D.), but the Persians themselves usually mean by it nothing more than some archaic or dialectical variety of their own spoken language; and it has this signification here.

In Persian poetry the Nightingale (*Bulbul*) is constantly represented as the lover of the Rose (*Gul*), a charming fancy, and one that is supported by rhyme, if not by reason.

Notes

VIII

Kaikobâd was a Persian king belonging to the mythical Kayânî dynasty.

IX

Kaikhosrú (Kai Khusrau), wrongly identified by Sir William Jones with Cyrus, was another monarch of the same dynasty as Kaikobâd. Firdausi has celebrated the exploits of all these legendary kings in his *Shâhnâma*, but the true hero of that great epic is Rustam, the son of Zâl. Zâl is said to have been born with white hair, exposed, and brought up by a prodigious bird called Simurgh. Rustam, his son by Rûdhâba, was a warrior of gigantic strength, who often led the Persians to battle against the Tûranian Afrâsiyâb and (though at times, like Achilles, he sulked in his tent) never failed to come to the rescue when all seemed lost.

The name of Hâtim, a chieftain of the tribe of Tai in pre-Islamic days, has become proverbial throughout the Muhammadan world for hospitality, a virtue most highly prized by the Bedouins among whom he lived. Innumerable stories are told of his extravagant generosity—how he gave away a whole herd of camels for a few lines of eulogy, slaughtered his favourite horse to feast a stranger who asked a night's lodging, and so on. He was a poet too. I venture to quote from my *Literary History of the Arabs*, p. 87, the following verses which he addressed to his wife :

“ O daughter of Abdullâh and Málik and him who wore
The two robes of Yemen stuff—the hero that rode the
roan,
When thou hast prepared the meal, entreat to partake
thereof
A guest—I am not the man to eat, like a churl,
alone— :

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Some traveller thro' the night or house-neighbour ; for
in sooth

I fear the reproachful talk of men after I am gone.

The guest's slave am I, 'tis true, as long as he bides
with me,

Although in my nature else no trait of the slave is shown."

X

Sultan Mahmûd of Ghazna in Afghanistan (998-1030 A.D.) founded a mighty empire including Khorasan, Transoxania, Cashmere, and a large part of North-western India. The line,

"Where name of Slave and Sultan scarce is known,"

suggests the observation that Mahmûd himself was of servile descent, his father, Subuktigîn, having been a Turkish slave who rose to eminence in the employ of Alptigîn, also a slave originally. "Mahmûd," says Professor Browne, "has often been described as a great patron of letters, but he was in fact rather a great kidnapper of literary men." While he desired the prestige reflected on him by the brilliant array of poets and savants who thronged his court, his shabby treatment of Firdausî is a sufficient proof that he did not love culture and learning for their own sakes.

XI

It is a commonplace in Persian literature that nothing can compare with a life of Arcadian simplicity and frugal pleasure, remote from the business of the world.

XII

In the original (W. 108) the last line of this stanza runs :

"For it is pleasant to hear the sound of a drum from afar,"

Notes

i.e. "don't let this idle talk of Paradise be dinned into my ears *now*!" 'Drum' implies that the bliss promised to good Moslems after their death is a mere fiction, an empty sound that means nothing.

XIII

FitzGerald took the idea for these verses from the last line of a Persian quatrain (W. 122) which expresses the sentiment that life cannot be enjoyed without money :

" Because the violet is empty-handed, it droops its head,
But the mouth of the rose is laughing because its purse
is full of gold."

The golden stamens of the rose are its 'Treasure.'

W. 243 :

XIV

" O soul, get for thyself all the riches of the world,
And deck the garden of thy pleasure with greenery,
But know that Life is like dew, that settles for a night
On the green leaves and in the morning is gone."

W. 175 :

XV

" O heedless fool, thou art not gold that thou shouldst
be laid in the earth and taken out again."

XVI

'Attâr relates in the *Memoirs of the Saints* that one day Ibrâhîm ibn Adham, Prince of Balkh, was seated on his throne, giving audience to his subjects and surrounded by courtiers and pages in due ceremony. Suddenly a man entered, whose appearance struck the attendants with such awe that their tongues sank into their throats, and not one of them dared to ask his name. He advanced and

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stood in front of the throne. "What do you want?" said Ibrâhîm. He replied, "I have come to lodge in this caravanserai." "This is not a caravanserai," said Ibrâhîm, "but my palace: you must be mad." "Who was the owner of this palace before you?" asked the stranger. "My father." "And before that?" "My father's father." "And before that?" "Such and such a one." "And before that?" "The father of such and such a one." "Where are they all gone?" "They are dead." "Then," cried the unknown, "is not this a caravanserai, where one comes and another goes?" With these words he departed and was seen no more.

XVII

Bahrâm V., generally called Bahrâm Gôr (Bahrâm the Wild Ass) on account of his fondness for hunting that animal, was a famous Persian King of the Sâsânian dynasty, who reigned from 420 to 438 A.D. In the 'Seven Pictures,' a romance by the poet Nizâmî, it is related that he fell in love with seven princesses whose portraits he found in a secret chamber in his palace of Khawarnaq, and built pavilions of different colours for each of them. He delighted in music and had Gipsies sent to him from India for this purpose. The original lines translated by Fitzgerald contain a play on the words *gôr* (wild ass) and *gôr* (grave).

W. 72 :

"Bahrâm who used to catch the wild ass with his lasso—
Dost thou mark how the grave has caught Bahrâm?"

XVIII

W. 104 :

"Wherever roses and tulips bloom,
They spring from the red blood of a mighty king.
Every violet that grows from the earth
Was once a mole on the cheek of a beauty."

Notes

W. 62 :

XIX

" Wherever grass has grown on the edge of a stream,
Thou wouldst say that it has grown from the lip of some
angelic creature.
Beware lest thou set thy foot on the grass scornfully !
For it has grown in the dust of a girl with tulip cheeks."

W. 312 :

XX

" Come, O my friend, let us not think of to-morrow,
But make the most of Life that is only a single breath !
To-morrow, when we journey on from this ancient wine-
house,
We shall march along the road with those who are seven
thousand years old."
The 7000 years are reckoned from the creation of Adam.

XXIII

The epigrammatic climax of this stanza is due to Fitzgerald.

XXIV

In the original Persian this quatrain (W. 376) is not definitely agnostic, but rather sets forth the view that neither theology nor philosophy can reveal the Truth, which is found by those who have traversed the Mystic Way.

" Some are pondering on doctrine and religion,
Others are bewildered over doubt and certainty.
Suddenly a crier rises up from his hiding-place,
Saying, ' O ye ignorant ! The right way is neither that
nor this.' "

The image of the muezzin chanting the call to prayer from the minaret of a mosque is not in the Persian, which

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only suggests a voice from the Unseen. Lane says (*The Modern Egyptians*, ch. 3): "Most of the muëddins of Cairo have harmonious and yet sonorous voices, which they strain to the utmost pitch: yet there is a simple and solemn melody in their chants which is very striking, particularly in the stillness of the night."

W. 209 :

XXV

"Those who encompassed all learning and culture
And, by amassing erudition, became as lamps to their
disciples,
Never made their way out of this dark night,
But told a story and went to sleep."

XXVII

This and the following stanza are a 'contamination' of two Persian quatrains.

W. 264 :

"I was a falcon who flew hither from the Unseen World,
That perchance from this low place I might soar aloft;
But finding here none learned in the mystery,
I went out by the same door where I came in."

W. 353 :

"For a while, in our youth, we went to a master;
For a while we took pleasure in being masters ourselves.
Hear now what is the end of the whole affair:
'We come from earth and we go on the wings of the
wind.'"

XXX

FitzGerald has given a turn of his own to the last two lines. The Persian runs (W. 110):

Notes

" Since my coming was not by my own will on the First Day,
And my going, with desire unaccomplished, is a fixed
 resolve (of Providence),
Rise and gird thy loins, O nimble Cup-bearer !
For I will wash down the sorrows of the world in wine."

XXXI

The original of this stanza (W. 303) is ascribed to Avicenna. According to the Ptolemaic system, " around the central, stationary earth revolves a series of nine hollow concentric shells called Spheres or Heavens, arranged one within the other, ' like the coats of an onion.' To each of the seven innermost of these is fastened one of the Seven Planets, which are thus carried round by the spheres in their revolution. These seven planetary spheres are in order, starting from the innermost : (1) that of the Moon, (2) that of Mercury, (3) that of Venus, (4) that of the Sun, (5) that of Mars, (6) that of Jupiter, (7) that of Saturn " (Gibb, *A History of Ottoman Poetry*, vol. i. p. 43). " The Seventh Gate," therefore, means the gate of the Seventh Heaven, over which Saturn presides.

XXXII

The concluding lines refer to the pantheistic doctrine of the Sûfis that there is no real existence apart from the One Absolute Being, which is diffused through the phenomenal universe by a perpetual succession of emanations. Human personality is essentially unreal and would disappear if the veil of phenomena were removed. Jalâlu'ddîn Rûmî says in the *Masnavî* :

" There is no 'two,' unless you are a worshipper of
 form :
Before Him who is without form all becomes one.

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When you regard form, you have two eyes ;
Look on His light, which is single.
Necessarily the eye, when it falls on One
Itself is one : ' two ' is out of sight."

XXXIV

The Persian (W. 274) has " to demand from it the means of prolonging life " instead of " the Secret of my Life to learn."

W. 32 :

XXXV

" This jug was once a wretched lover like me,
Enamoured of the curls of a beauty,
The handle which you see on its neck
Is a hand that once clasped the neck of a loved one."

XXXVI

The last line of the original quatrain (W. 252) is more explicit :

" I was a man like yourself : deal with me kindly."

Cf. 'Attâr's apologue (*Mantiq-u 't- Tair*, vv. 2345-2359) translated by FitzGerald and published in his *Letters and Literary Remains* (1890), vol. ii. p. 467.

XXXVIII

The last two lines were suggested by W. 136 :

" This caravan of Life is passing on with wondrous
haste :
Seize the moment that is passing merrily ! "

Notes

XXXIX

Sûfis use the phrase "This and That" (*in u ân*) to signify the multiplicity of phenomena contrasted with the Unity of God.

W. 196 :

XL

"First, I will thrice divorce Reason and Religion,
Then I will take the daughter of the Vine to wife."

"The daughter of the Vine" (*dukhtari raz*) is a hackneyed metaphor for wine, which is also styled 'the mother of iniquities' (*ummu 'l-khabâ'ith*).

W. 336 :

XLI

"I know the outward form of Not-being and Being,
And I know the inward essence of everything, high and low alike.

Nevertheless, may I be ashamed of my knowledge
If I know any degree more exalted than drunkenness !"

This is perhaps a parody of the Sûfî doctrine that the highest knowledge is gained through illumination and ecstasy.

XLII

FitzGerald has turned the "old man" of the original quatrain (W. 284) into "an Angel Shape."

XLIII

It is said in a Tradition of the Prophet : "My people shall be divided into seventy-three sects, and all of them shall be in the Fire save one sect." On being asked which sect would be that one, he replied : "That which I follow and my companions."

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XLIV

Sultan Mahmûd of Ghazna (see note on stanza x.) is called "the victorious Lord" in allusion to his successful campaigns, as the champion of Islam, against "the misbelieving and black Horde" of Hindoo idolaters, who vainly offered him an enormous sum of money on condition that he should spare the famous idol of Sûmnât. Cf. 'Attâr's *Mantiqû 'l-Tair*, v. 3100 and foll.

W. 310 :

XLVI

"This wheel of heaven, at which we stand amazed,
We deem like unto a magic lantern :
The sun is the lamp, the world is the shade,
And we ourselves are the figures revolving on it."

The magic lantern of the East is sometimes a lamp with a revolving shade, on which figures are painted.

W. 282 :

XLVII

"Since at the last you will be nothing,
Think that you are not, and, while you are, be merry !"

W. 270 :

XLIX

"We are all chess-men, and Heaven is the player
In reality, not metaphorically.
We play a brief game on the board of Life,
And return, one by one, to the box of Non-existence."

L

This stanza (W. 401) alludes to the favourite Persian game of polo.

Notes

W. 257 :

LI

" Submit to Destiny and put up with affliction,
For this Pen, having once written, will never go back
for thy sake."

Moslems believe that the eternal decrees of Allah are inscribed by the Divine Pen on a tablet beneath His Throne.

LII

The comparison of the sky to a bowl turned upside down is common in Persian poetry.

LIII

This stanza appears to have been invented by Fitzgerald, but many of the original quatrains express the same idea in different language.

W. 140 :

LIV

" On the day when they saddled the wild horse of heaven
(the sun),
And equipped Mushtari and Parwin,
This portion was assigned to me by the Registry of Fate.
What sin have I done ? This is my destined lot."

Mushtari is the planet Jupiter, and Parwin the Pleiades.

LV

'Sûfi' is the Muhammadan term corresponding to 'mystic.' The word was originally derived from the garments of wool (*saf*) which some early Moslems wore as a sign of asceticism. Here the Sûfi stands as a type of sanctimonious piety. In later editions of the poem the Dervish, or religious mendicant, takes his place—

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an alteration probably suggested by the verb "howls" in the last line. There is a special order of 'Howling Dervishes' (the Rifâ 'îs), who utter loud barks and shrieks during the performance of their orgiastic exercises, but the practice is not confined to them.

LVI

"The one True Light" is God, whom the mystics of Islam generally call 'the Truth' (*al-Haqq*). They say that 'the Truth' is invested with attributes of Majesty (*Jalâl*)—such as Wrath, Vengeance, etc., and attributes of Beauty (*Jamâl*)—such as Love, Mercy, etc.; that the Majestic Attributes are reflected in the existence of Hell, the Beautiful Attributes in the existence of Paradise; and that Man is the Microcosm who reflects all the Attributes, beautiful as well as majestic, in himself. This is the explanation of W. 92:

"Hell is a spark from our fruitless pain,
Paradise a breath from our time of joy,"

and similar passages, which suggested to FitzGerald the magnificent stanza (lxvii. in his final edition):

"Heav'n but the Vision of fulfill'd Desire,
And Hell the Shadow from a Soul on fire,
Cast on the Darkness into which Ourselves,
So late emerged from, shall so soon expire."

The Persian original of the concluding distich is (W. 262):

"If I tell Thee my heart's secret in the Tavern,
That is better than to say my prayers without Thee in
the Mosque."

The Tavern symbolises true adoration of God in the raptures of mystic love, while the Mosque (or Temple) indicates such formal and passionless worship as is rendered by the worldly.

Notes

LVII

In this stanza FitzGerald has kept closer than he usually does to the Persian (W. 432).

LVIII

This famous quatrain has no definite original, although parallels might be found for the greater part of it. But in the last words FitzGerald has out-Omared Omar. Cf. W. 265 :

" He made the (natural) law, which it is impossible not to obey,

And then ordered us to refrain from following it.

Thus every one in the world is helpless and desperate

Between His command and His prohibition : '*tilt the jar but do not spill !*' "

LIX

Stanzas lix. to lxvi. make up the *Kāza-nāma*, that is, 'the Pot-Book.' It was inspired by several Persian quatrains which represent God as a Potter moulding or breaking human crockery. The first two stanzas are little more than an amplification of W. 283 :

" Yestereve I went into a potter's workshop

And saw two thousand pots speaking and listening.

Suddenly one pot raised his voice and cried,

' He is the Potter and the pot-buyer and the pot-seller.' "

Ramazân, the ninth month of the Muhammadan year, is the Moslem Lent, during which nothing may be eaten between sunrise and sunset. The Muhammadan year

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being lunar, its months go the round of the seasons ; and when Ramazân coincides with midsummer, the intense heat renders the Fast extremely fatiguing. It is proclaimed on the next day after the new moon has been seen, and is ended on the appearance of the new moon—here called “the better moon”—of Shawwâl (the following month), which is anxiously looked for.

LX

According to the Sûff doctrine of ‘Unification,’ Potter and pot are essentially one (cf. note on stanza xxxii.). Similarly Bâyezîd of Bistâm, a celebrated Persian pantheist, said :

“I am the wine-drinker and the wine and the cup-bearer.”

W. 42 :

LXII

“The cup which He moulded and put together—
How can He think right to break it in a fit of drunkenness?
All those lovely heads and feet and hands—
For love of what did He make them ? For hate of what
did He break them ? ”

W. 193 :

LXIV

“They say that at the Resurrection harsh words will be
spoken
And the Almighty Friend will be severe.
Only kindness can come from Absolute Good :
Be cheerful, for it will end well.”

Notes

W. 218 :

LXVI

"The month of Ramazân is past, and Shawwâl has come,
The time of mirth and pleasure and song has come.
The hour has come when people cry, 'Shoulder the
wine-skins !'
For the porters, jostling one another, have come."

"The little crescent" is "the better moon" of stanza lix.
(*q.v.*), whose appearance marks the expiration of the Fast
and the commencement of a feast lasting for three days.

W. 17 :

LXVIII

"I will drink so much wine that the odour of the vintage
Will come forth from my dust when I go under the dust ;
So that toppers who visit my sepulchre
Will be made tipsy and dead-drunk by the fumes of
my wine."

LXX

Cf. W. 212 and 425. 'To break vows of penitence in
the season of the rose' must have been a popular custom
in Persia, to judge from the number of poetical allusions
to it.

LXXI

Professor Browne gives the following translation of a
similar verse by the poet Kisâ'i, who flourished about a
century before Omar :

"O flower-girl, why the rose for silver sell,
For what more precious with its price canst buy ?"

Omar Khayyâm

W. 155 :

LXXII

" Alas ! the manuscript of Youth is folded up,
And this fresh springtide of Joy is finished.
The bird of gladness, whose name is Youth,
Alas ! I know not when it came, when it went ! "

W. 379 :

LXXIII

" Had I power over the Sphere, as God hath,
I would demolish this Sphere and leave no trace of it.
I would frame another Sphere anew,
Where the noble might easily attain to their heart's
desire."

W. 7 :

LXXIV

" Drink wine by moonlight, O Moon ! for the moon
Will often shine hereafter and will not find us."

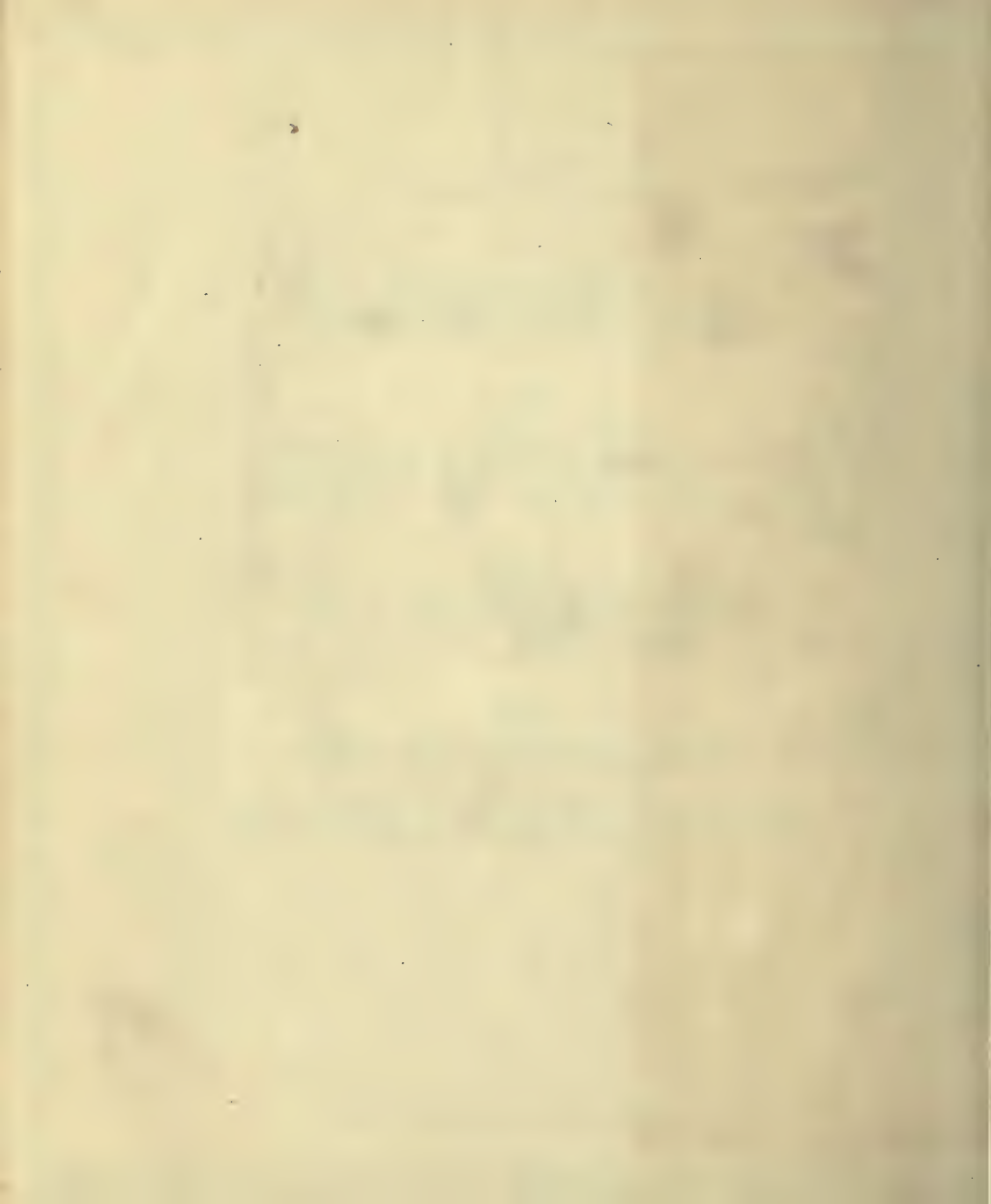
Persian poets commonly describe a beautiful youth or
girl as a ' moon.'

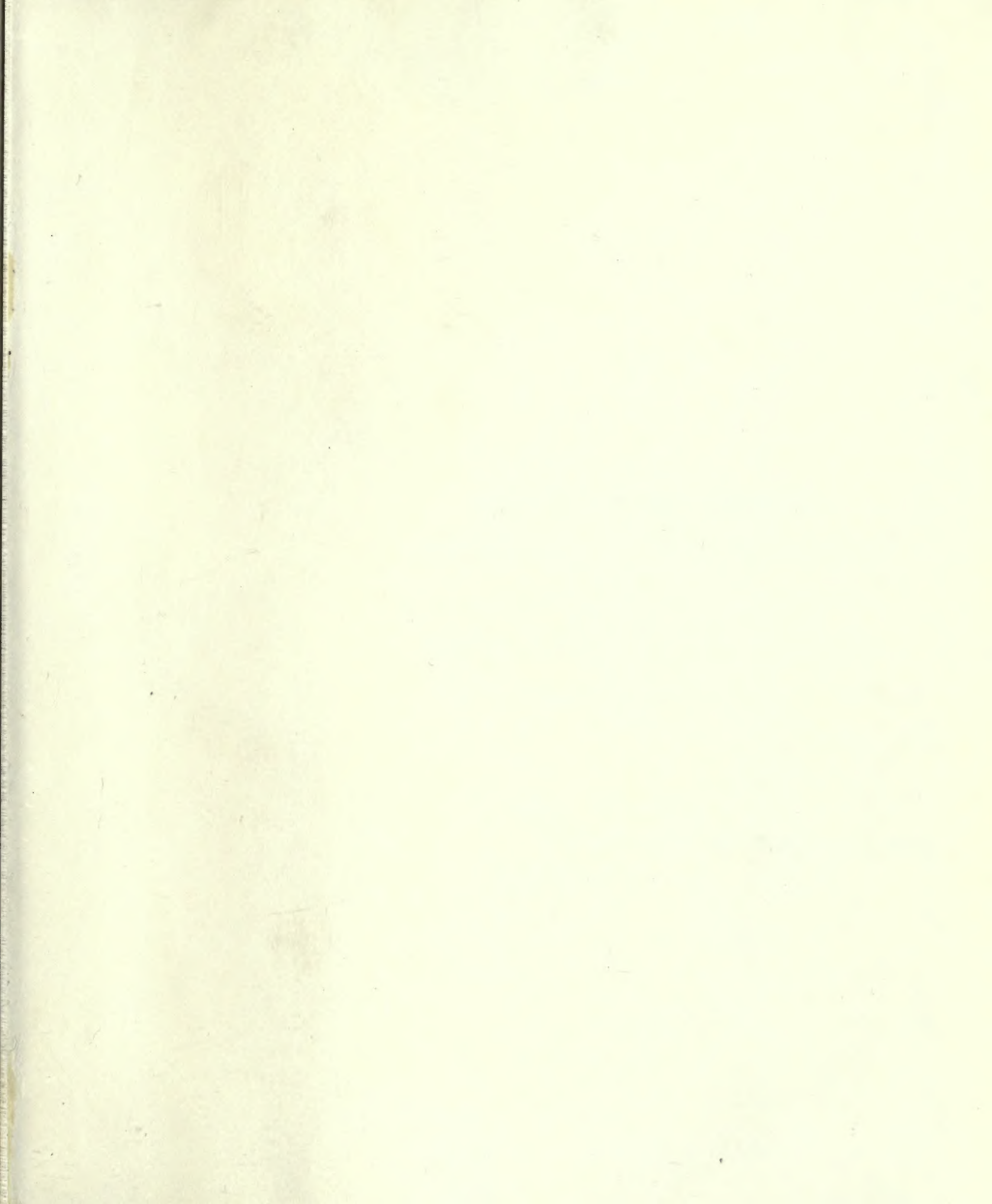
W. 234

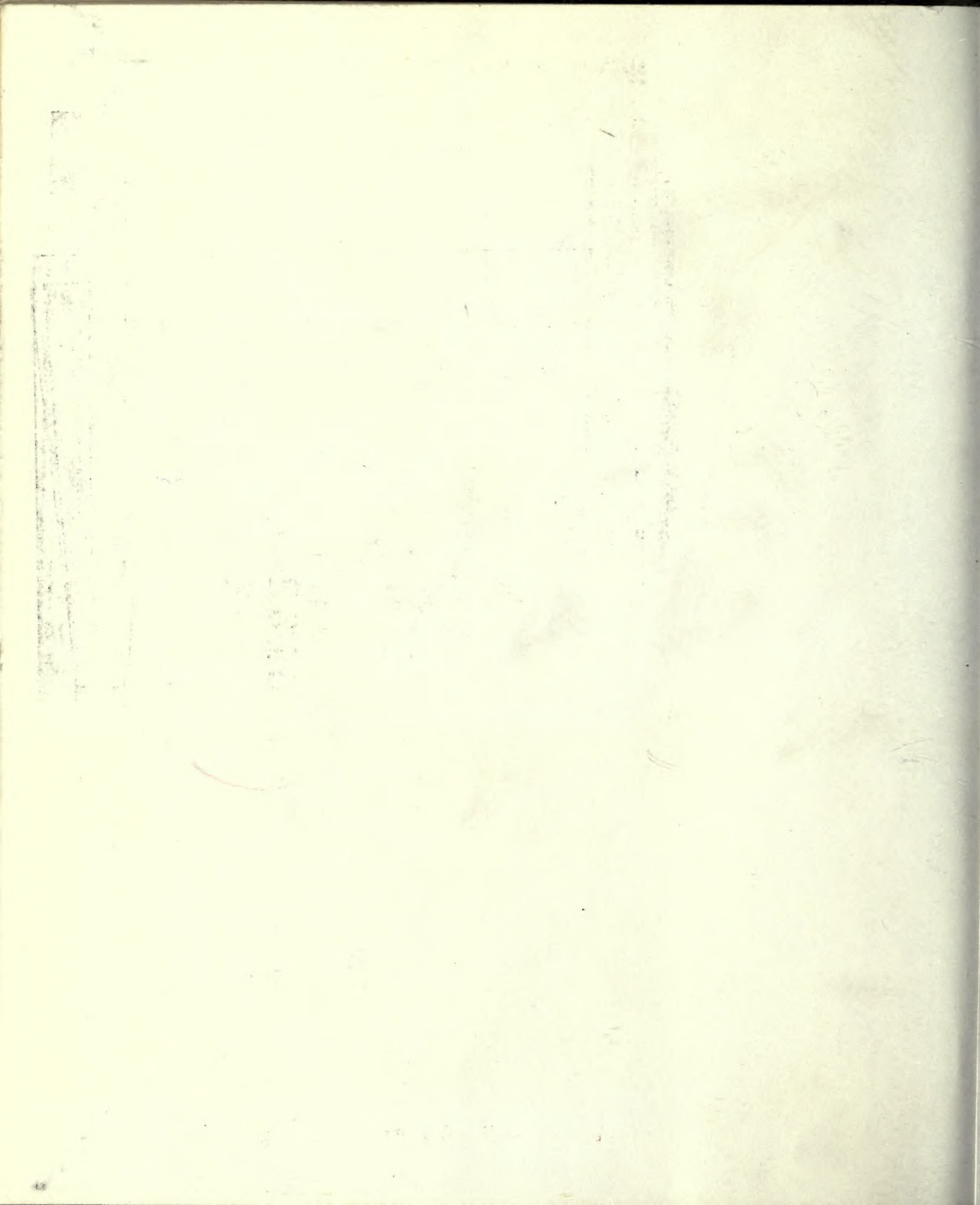
LXXV

" While ye quaff together the sweet-tasting wine,
When it comes to my turn, invert the cup ! "

It is related of the pre-Islamic poet, A'shâ, who was a
great wine-drinker, that revellers used to meet at his grave
and pour on it the last drops that remained in their cups.







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